

# IMAGINATION

SCIENCE FICTION

APRIL, 1956

35¢

## LEGION OF LAZARUS

by Edmond Hamilton

**I**T ISN'T the dying itself. It's what comes before. The waiting, alone in a room without windows, trying not to think. The opening of the door, the voices of the men who are going with you but not all the way. The walk down the corridor to the airlock room, the faces of the men, closed and impersonal. They do not enjoy this. Neither do they shrink from it. It's their job.

This is the room. It is small and it has a window. Outside there is no friendly sky, no clouds. There is space, and there is the huge red circle of Mars filling the sky, looking down like an enormous eye upon this tiny moon. But you do not look up. You look out.

There are men out there. They are quite naked.

The one garment you have worn is taken from you and the lock door opens, and the fear that cannot possibly become greater does become greater, and then suddenly—



# Introducing the



# AUTHOR

★  
*Edmond Hamilton*  
★

I BEGAN writing science-fiction when I was twenty years old, back in the first months of 1926. In fact, there weren't any science-fiction magazines yet published when I wrote my first s-f stories, and I sold them to the old WEIRD TALES.

I've lost count, but have published something like 300 stories, most of them s-f but also a number in other fields. Thirty-two of them were novel-lengths.

Born in Ohio, I lived a good many years in Western Pennsylvania. Knocked around the country a good bit — including some colorful trips years ago with my old friend Jack Williamson, the most interesting and arduous of which was a trek down the Mississippi River from St. Paul to Louis-

iana in a small skiff.

In 1946 I married Leigh Brackett — we lived a while in Los Angeles and then, on a visit back east, decided to realize the perennial writer's dream of a small house way out in the country where we could work undisturbed. We purchased a 130-year old farmhouse in the old Western Reserve of Ohio, and set to work to renovate the venerable wreck. As might be expected, for the next few years we did more renovating than writing. We've finally called it done — and live therein with a few thousand books, a few hundred r. p. records, a few friendly squirrels who like our attic, and with many near neighbors in the form of woodchucks who like our clover,

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*William L. Hamling*  
Editor

*Frances Hamling*  
Managing Editor

*W. E. Jerry*  
Art Editor

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# The Editorial

WE'VE tried something a bit different on the cover this month as you've already noted. We had a particular reason for starting the story right along with the cover painting; we felt the opening was so good it deserved front page advertising—so it would catch your eye right away. Aside from the commercial motive which prompted this innovation, we've since been wondering if it wouldn't be a good idea to continue doing this in the future. Not every issue, of course, but once in awhile. So you'll be doing us a favor if you'll drop us a card and let us know how you like the idea.

THIS issue we've got a sad announcement to make; yet, happily, as a result of the development, there's a bit of good news too. First the sad: this issue marks the last column Mari Wolf will write for our fan department, FANDORA'S BOX. Mari wrote us regretfully that her time is being taken up not only by her outside work, being a housewife, and racing sports cars, but in addition she wants to devote what little free time she has left to serious writing. (Seems as if the novel bug has got hold of our gal!) We can only say that Madge will miss Mari; she's been part of the magazine, since the fourth issue—

back in April, 1951. We feel she did a fine job on the column, and know that you do too. We wish her the best of luck in her serious writing!

NATURALLY Mari's leaving puts us in something of a spot. We had the next issue coming up and no reviewer! It was then that the lovely gal we're married to came up with the brilliant suggestion that perhaps we could interest fandom's favorite pro into taking over the column. Who? Why Robert Bloch, of course!

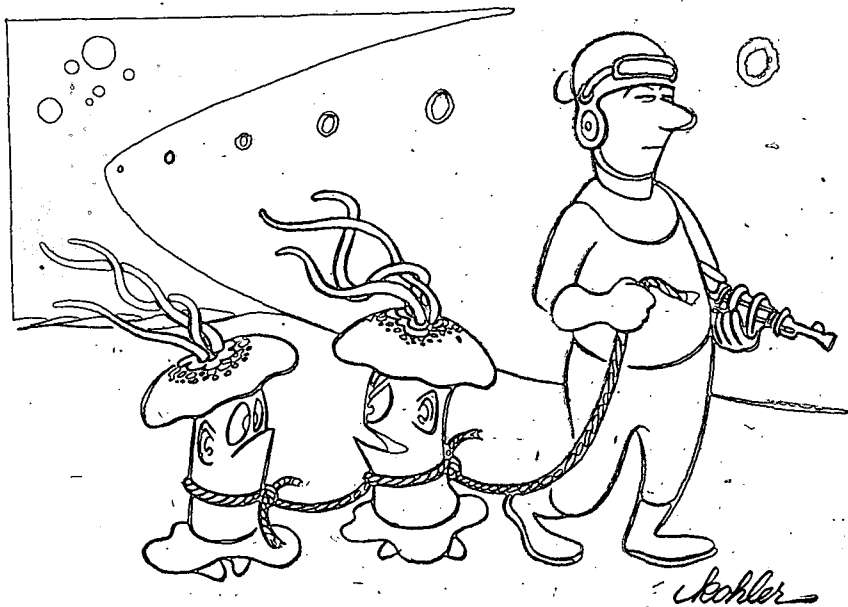
SHORTLY thereafter we spent a pleasant afternoon at Bob's place in Weyauwega, Wisconsin, and broached the subject. Bob evinced interest, but when we finally put the matter to him bluntly he hedged. "It all depends," he said sagely. We inquired as to the nature of the conditions. He sighed. "The word rate, Bill. How much?"

HAVING cleaned up this sordid aspect of the business to everyone's satisfaction, Bob allowed he would be most happy to take over the department. He felt compelled to warn us however that he could not guarantee how the column would turn out. Since Bob's per has all the earmarks of a three ring circus we can only surmise that n

matter what is transcribed from his fertile brain, it will most certainly prove entertaining. So, starting next issue look for the new ringmaster holding forth in the BOX. (We must admit at this point that Bob actually never mentioned the word money in our conversation as above described. While Bob makes his living as a professional writer, he has far too much delicacy to hurt an editor's feelings by putting his work on a cash basis. A check will do just as well!)

**A**FTER leaving the Blochs (we must not forget Marion's (gracious hospitality) we journeyed farther into the cold of northern

Wisconsin to visit Ray Palmer. (It was warm for that part of the country, a sultry 15 below zero.) Ray—editor of *Other Worlds*—was busily engaged in moving into his new home constructed on a hill overlooking his private lake. All we saw was a snow-covered ice pack, but Ray assured us the water would appear come spring. He told us of his plan to bring a new Edgar Rice Burroughs into stff. Read his magazine for complete details. And don't forget our next issue of Madge—and *Imaginative Tales*, our companion book. How did our trip end so abruptly? It was cold, man! We're glad we're home again. It's only zero here in Evanston! . . .wlh



"Still think those flashes in the sky are figments of my imagination?"

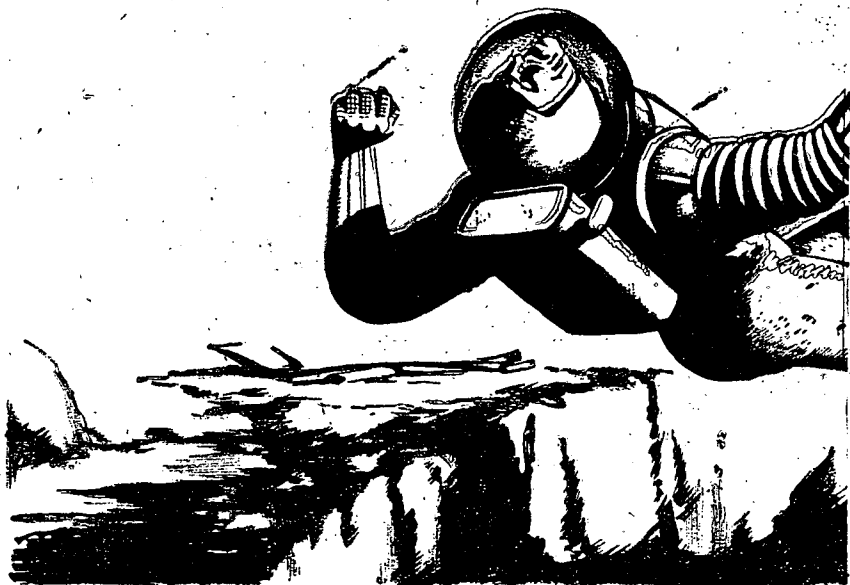
Being expelled from an air lock into deep space was the legal method of execution. But it was also the only way a man could qualify for—

# The Legion Of Lazarus

by

Edmond Hamilton

**I**T ISN'T the dying itself. It's what comes before. The waiting, alone in a room without windows, trying to think. The opening of the door, the voices of the men who are going with you but not all the way, the walk down the corridor to the airlock room, the faces of the men, closed and impersonal. They do not enjoy this. Neither do they shrink from it. It's their job.







*This is the room. It is small and it has a window. Outside there is no friendly sky, no clouds. There is space, and there is the huge red circle of Mars filling the sky, looking down like an enormous eye upon this tiny moon. But you do not look up. You look out.*

*There are men out there. They are quite naked. They sleep upon the barren plain, drowsing in a timeless ocean. Their bodies are white as ivory and their hair is loose across their faces. Some of them seem to smile. They lie, and sleep, and the great red eye looks at them forever as they are borne around it.*

*"It isn't so bad," says one of the men who are with you inside this ultimate room. "Fifty years from now, the rest of us will all be old, or dead."*

*It is small comfort.*

*The one garment you have worn is taken from you and the lock door opens, and the fear that cannot possibly become greater does become greater, and then suddenly that terrible crescendo is past. There is no longer any hope, and you learn that without hope there is little to be afraid of. You want now only to get it over with.*

*You step forward into the lock.*

*The door behind you shuts. You sense that the one before you is opening, but there is not much time. The burst of air carries you for-*

*ward. Perhaps you scream, but you are now beyond sound, beyond sight, beyond everything. You do not even feel that it is cold.*

## CHAPTER I

**T**HERE is a time for sleep, and a time for waking. But Hyrst had slept heavily, and the waking was hard. He had slept long, and the waking was slow. *Fifty years*, said the dim voice of remembrance. But another part of his mind said, No, it is only tomorrow morning.

Another part of his mind. That was strange. There seemed to be more parts to his mind than he remembered having had before, but they were all confused and hidden behind a veil of mist. Perhaps they were not really there at all. Perhaps—

*Fifty years. I have been dead, he thought, and now I live again. Half a century. Strange.*

Hyrst lay on a narrow bed, in a place of subdued light and antiseptic-smelling air. There was no one else in the room. There was no sound.

*Fifty years*, he thought. *What is it like now, the house where I lived once, the country, the planet? Where are my children, where are my friends, my enemies, the people I loved, the people I hated?*

*Where is Elena? Where is my wife?*



A whisper out of nowhere, sad, remote. *Your wife is dead and your children are old. Forget them. Forget the friends and the enemies.*

*But I can't forget!* cried Hyrst silently in the spaces of his own mind. It was only yesterday —

*Fifty years,* said the whisper. *And you must forget.*

MacDonald, said Hyrst suddenly. *I didn't kill him. I was innocent. I can't forget that.*

Careful, said the whisper. *Watch out.*

*I didn't kill MacDonald. Somebody did. Somebody let me pay for it. Who? Was it Landers? Was it Saul? We four were together out there on Titan, when he died.*

Careful, Hyrst. *They're coming. Listen to me. You think this is your own mind speaking, question-and-answer. But it isn't.*

Hyrst sprang upright on the narrow bed, his heart pounding, the sweat running cold on his skin. *Who are you? Where are you? How—*

*They're here,* said the whisper calmly. *Be quiet.*

Two men came into the ward. "I am Dr. Merridew," said the one in the white coverall, smiling at Hyrst with a brisk professional smile. "This is Warden Meister. We didn't mean to startle you. There are a few questions, before we release you—"

Merridew, said the whisper in

Hyrst's mind, *is a psychiatrist. Let me handle this.*

Hyrst sat still, his hands lax between his knees, his eyes wide and fixed in astonishment. He heard the psychiatrist's questions, and he heard the answers he gave to them, but he was merely an instrument, with no conscious volition, it was the whisperer in his mind who was answering. Then the warden shuffled some papers he held in his hand and asked questions of his own.

"You underwent the Humane Penalty without admitting your guilt. For the record, now that the penalty has been paid, do you wish to change your final statements?"

The voice in Hyrst's mind, the secret voice, said swiftly to him. *Don't argue with them, don't get angry, or they'll keep you on and on here.*

"But —" thought Hyrst.

*I know you're innocent, but they'll never believe it. They'll keep you on for further psychiatric tests. They might get near the truth, Hyrst — the truth about us.*

Suddenly Hyrst began to understand, not all and not clearly, something of what had happened to him. The obscuring mists began to lift from the borders of his mind.

"What is the truth," he asked in that inner quiet, "about us?"

*You've spent fifty years in the*

*Valley of the Shadow. You're changed, Hyrst. You're not quite human any more. No one is, who goes through the freeze. But they don't know that.*

"Then you too—"

*Yes. And I too changed. And that is why our minds can speak, even though I am on Mars and you are on its moon. But they must not know that. So don't argue, don't show emotion!*

The warden was waiting. Hyrst said aloud to him, slowly. "I have no statement to make."

The warden did not seem surprised. He went on, "According to your papers here you also denied knowing the location of the Titanite for which MacDonald was presumably murdered.. Do you still deny that?"

Hyrst was honestly surprised. "But surely; by now—"

The warden shrugged. "According to this data, it never came to light."

"I never knew," said Hyrst, "where it was."

"Well," said the warden, "I've asked the question and that's as far as my responsibility goes. But there's a visitor who has permission to see you."

**H**E AND the doctor went out. Hyrst watched them go. He thought, So I'm not quite human. Not quite human any more. Does

that make me more, or less, than a man?

*Both, said the secret voice. Their minds are still closed to you. Only our minds — we who have changed too— are open.*

"Who are you?" asked Hyrst.

*My name is Shearing. Now listen. When you are released, they'll bring you down here to Mars. I'll be waiting for you. I'll help you.*

"Why? What do you care about me, or a murder fifty years old?"

*I'll tell you why later, said the whisper of Shearing. But you must follow my guidance. There's danger for you, Hyrst, from the moment you're released! There are those who have been waiting for you.*

"Danger? But—"

The door opened, and Hyrst's visitor came in. He was a man something over sixty but the deep lines in his face made him look older. His face was gray and drawn and twitching, but it became perfectly rigid and white when he came to the foot of the bed and looked at Hyrst. There was rage in his eyes, a rage so old and weary that it brought tears to them.

"You should have stayed dead," he said to Hyrst. "Why couldn't they let you stay dead?"

Hyrst was shocked and startled. "Who are you? And why —"

The other man was not even listening. His eyelids had closed, and when they opened again they look-

ed on naked agony. "It isn't right," he said. "A murderer should die, and stay dead. Not come back."

"I didn't murder MacDonald," Hyrst said, with the beginnings of anger. "And I don't know why you—"

He stopped. The white, aging face, the tear-filled, furious eyes, he did not quite know what there was about them but it was there, like an old remembered face peeping up through a blur of water for a moment, and then withdrawing again.

After a moment, Hyrst said hoarsely, "What's your name?"

"You wouldn't know it," said the other. "I changed it, long ago."

Hyrst felt a cold, and it seemed that he could not breathe. He said, "But you were only eleven—"

He could not go on. There was a terrible silence between them. He must break it, he could not let it go on, he must speak. But all he could say was to whisper, "I'm not a murderer. You must believe it. I'm going to prove it—"

"You murdered MacDonald. And you murdered my mother. I watched her age and die, spending every penny, spending every drop of her blood and ours, to get you back again. I pretended for fifty years that I too believed you were innocent, when all the time I knew."

Hyrst said, "I'm innocent." He

tried to say a name, too, but he could not speak the word.

"No. You're lying, as you lied then. We found out. Mother hired detectives, experts. Over and over, for decades — and always they found the same thing. Landers and Saul could not possibly have killed MacDonald, and you were the only other human being there. Proof? I can show you barrels of it. And all of it proof that my father was a murderer."

He leaned a little toward Hyrst, and the tears ran down his lined, careworn face. He said, "All right, you've come back. Alive, still young. But I'm warning you. If you try again to get that Titanite, if you shame us all again after all this time, if you even come near us, I'll kill you."

He went out. Hyrst sat, looking after him, and he thought that no man before him had ever felt what tore him now.

Inside his mind came Shearing's whisper, with a totally unexpected note of compassion. *But some of us have, Hyrst. Welcome to the brotherhood. Welcome to the Legion of Lazarus.*

## CHAPTER II

MARS ROARED and glittered tonight. And how was a man to stand the faces and lights and sounds, when he had come back

from the silence of eternity?

Hyrst walked through the flaring streets of Syrtis City with slow and dragging steps. It was like being back on Earth. For this city was not really part of the old dead planet, of the dark barrens that rolled away beneath the night. This was the place of the rocket-men, the miners, the schemers, the workers, who had come from another, younger world. Their bars and entertainment houses flung a sun-like brilliance. Their ships, lifting majestically skyward from the distant spaceport, wrote their flaming sign on the sky. Only here and there moved one of the hooded, robed humanoids who had once owned this world.

*The next corner, said the whisper in Hyrst's mind. Turn there. No, not toward the spaceport. The other way.*

Hyrst thought suddenly, "Shearing."

Yes?

"I am being followed."

His physical ears heard nothing but the voices and music. His physical eyes saw only the street crowd. Yet he knew. He knew it by a picture that kept coming into his mind, of a blurred shape moving always behind him.

*Of course you're being followed, came Shearing's thought. I told you they've been waiting for you. This is the corner. Turn.*

Hyrst turned. It was a darker street, running away from the lights through black warehouses and on the labyrinthine monolithic houses of the humanoid.

*Now look back, Shearing commanded. No, not with your eyes! With your mind. Learn to use your talents.*

Hyrst tried. The blurred image in his mind came clearer, and clearer still, and it was a young man with a vicious mouth and flat uncaring eyes. Hyrst shivered. "Who is he?"

*He works for the men who have been waiting for you, Hyrst. Bring him this way.*

"This—way?"

*Look ahead. With your mind. Can't you learn?*

Stung to sudden anger, Hyrst flung out a mental probe with a power he hadn't known he possessed. In a place of total darkness between two warehouses ahead, he saw a tall man lounging at his ease. Shearing laughed.

*Yes, it's me. Just walk past me. Don't hurry.*

Hyrst glanced backward, mentally at the man following him through the shadows. He was closer now, and quite silent. His face was tight and secret. Hyrst thought, How do I know this Shearing isn't in it with him, taking me into a place where they can both get at me—

He went past the two warehouses and he did not turn his head but his mind saw Shearing waiting in the darkness. Then there was a soft, shapeless sound, and he turned and saw Shearing bending over a huddled form.

"That was unkind of you," said Shearing, speaking aloud but not loudly.

Hyrst, still shaking, said, "But not exactly strange. I've never seen you before. And I still don't know what this is all about."

Shearing smiled, as he knelt beside the prone, unmoving body. Even here in the shadows, Hyrst could see him with these new eyes of the mind. Shearing was a big man. His hair was grizzled along the sides of his head, and his eyes were dark and very keen. He reached out one hand and turned the head of the prone young man, and they looked at the lax, loose face.

"He's not dead?" said Hyrst.

"Of course not. But it will be a while before he wakes."

"But who is he?"

Shearing stood up. "I never saw him before. But I know who he's working for."

**H**YRST FLUNG a sudden question at Shearing, and almost without thinking he followed it to surprise the answer in Shearing's mind. The question was, *Who are*

*you working for?* And the answer was a woman, a tall and handsome woman with angry eyes, standing against a drift of stars. There was a ship, all lonely on a dark plain, and she was pointing to it, and somehow Hyrst knew that it was vitally important to her, and to Shearing, and perhaps even to himself. But before he could do more than register this fleeting vision on his own consciousness, Shearing's mind slammed shut with exactly the same violent effect as a door slammed in his face. He reeled back, throwing up his arms in a futile but instinctive gesture, and Shearing said angrily,

"You're getting too good. I'll give you a social hint—it's customary to knock before you enter."

Hyrst said, still holding the pieces of his head together, "All right—sorry. So who is she?"

"She's one of us. She wants what we want."

"I want only to find out who murdered MacDonald!"

"You want more than that, Hyrst, though you don't know it yet. But MacDonald's murderer is part of what we're after."

He took Hyrst's arm. "We don't have long. Thanks to my guidance, you slipped them all except this one. But they'll be hounding after our trail very quickly."

They went on along the shadowed street. The glare of the lights

died back behind them, and they moved in darkness with only the keen stars to watch them, and the cold, gritty wind blowing in from the barrens, and the dark doorways of the mastaba-like monolithic houses of the "humanoids" staring at them like sightless eyes. Hyrst looked up at the bright, tiny moon that crept amid the stars, and a deep shaking took him as he thought of men lying up there in the deathly sleep, of himself lying there year after year . . .

"In here," said Shearing. It was one of the frigid, musty tombs that the humanoids called home. It was dark and there was nothing in it at all. "We can't risk a light. We don't need it, anyway."

They sat down. Hyrst said desperately, "Listen, I want to know some things. Exactly what are we doing here?"

Shearing answered deliberately, "We are hiding from those who want you, and we are waiting for a chance to go to our friends."

"Our friends? Your friends, maybe. That woman—I don't know her, and—"

Now *you* listen, Hyrst. I'll tell you this much about us now. We're Lazarites, like you, with the same powers as you. But all Lazarites are not on *our* side."

Hyrst thought about that. "Then those others who are hunting us —"

"There are Lazarites among them, too. Not many, but a few. You don't know us, you don't know them. Do you want to leave me and go back out and let them have you?"

Hyrst remembered the adder-like face of the young man who had come after him through the shadows. After a long moment he said, "Well. But what are *you* after?"

"The thing that MacDonald was killed for, fifty years ago."

Hyrst said, "The Titanite? They said it hadn't ever been found. But how it could have remained hidden so long—"

"I want you," Shearing said, "to tell me all about how MacDonald died. Everything you can remember."

Hyrst asked eagerly, "You think we can find out who killed him? After all this time? God, if we could — my son —"

"Quiet, Hyrst. Go ahead and tell me. Not in words. Just remember what happened, and I'll get it."

Yet, by sheer lifetime habit, Hyrst could not remember without first putting it into words in his own mind, as they two sat in the cold, whispering darkness.

"There were four of us out there on Titan, you must already know that. And only four—"

**FOUR MEN.** And one was named MacDonald, an en-



gineer, a secretive, selfish and enormously greedy man. MacDonald was the man who found a fortune, and kept it secret, and died.

Landers was one. A lean, brown, lively man, an excellent physicist with a friendly manner and no obvious ambitions.

Saul was one, and he was big and blond and quiet, a good drinking companion, a good geologist, a lover of good music. If he had any darker passions, he kept them hidden.

Hyrst was the fourth man, and the only one of the four still living

He remembered now. He saw the black and bitter crags of Titan stark against the glory of the Rings, and he saw two figures moving across a plain of methane snow, their helmets gleaming in the Saturn-light. Behind them in the plain were the flat, half-buried concrete structures of the little refinery, and all around them were the spidery roads where the big half-tracs dragged their loads of uranium ore from the enchaining mountains.

The two men were quarrelling. "You're angry," MacDonald was saying, "because it was I who found it."

"Listen," Hyrst said. "We're sick, all three of us, of hearing you brag about it."

"I'll bet you are," said Mac-

Donald smugly. "The first find of a Titanite pocket for years. The rarest, costliest stuff in the System. If you know the way they've been bidding to buy it from me—"

"I do know," Hyrst said. "You've done nothing for weeks but give forth mysterious hints—"

"And you don't like that," MacDonald said. "Of course you don't! It's no part of our refinery deal, it's mine, I've got it and it's hidden where nobody can find it till I sell it. Naturally, you don't like that."

"All right," said Hyrst. "So the Titanite find is all yours. You're still a partner in the refinery, remember. And you've still got an obligation to the rest of us, so you can damn well get in and do your job."

"Don't worry. I've always done my job."

"More or less," said Hyrst. "For your information, I've seen better engineers in grade-school. There's Number Three hoist. It's been busted for a week. Now let's get in there and fix it."

The two figures in Hyrst's memory toiled on, out of the area of roads to the edge of the landing field, where the ships come to take away the refined uranium. Number Three hoist rose in a stiff, ugly column from the ground. It was supposed to fetch the uranium up from the underground

storage bins and load it into a specially-built hot-tank ship in position at the dock. But Number Three had balked and refused to perform its task. In this completely automated plant, men were only important when something went wrong. Now something was wrong, and it was up to MacDonald, the mechanical engineer, and Hyrst, the electronics man, to set it right.

Hyrst opened the hatch, and they climbed the metal stairs to the upper chamber. Number Three's brain was here, its scanners, its tabulating and recording apparatus, its signal system. A red light pulsed on a panel, alone in a string of white ones.

"Trouble's in the hoist-mechanism," said Hyrst. "That's your department." He smiled and sat down on a metal bench in the center of the room, with his back to the stair. "D'Level."

MacDonald grumbled, and went to a skeletal cage built over a round segment of the floor. Various tools were clipped to the ribs of the cage. MacDonald pulled an extra rayproof protectall over his vac-suit and stepped inside the cage, pressing a button. The cage dropped, into a circular shaft that paralleled the hoist right down to the feeder mechanism.

Hyrst waited. Inside his helmet he could hear MacDonald breathing and grumbling as he worked

away, repairing a break in the belt. He did not hear anything else. Then something happened, so swiftly that he had never had any memory of it, and some time later he came to and looked for MacDonald. The cage was way down at the bottom of the shaft and MacDonald was in it, with a very massive pedestal-block on top of him. The block had been unbolted from the floor and dragged to the edge of the shaft, and it could not possibly have been an accident that it tumbled in, between the wide-apart ribs of the cage.

And that's how MacDonald died, Hyrst thought—and so I died. They said I forced the secret of his Titanite find out of him, and then killed him.

Shearing asked swiftly, "MacDonald never gave you any hint of where he'd hidden the Titanite?"

"No," said Hyrst. He paused, and then said, "It's the Titanite you're after?"

Shearing answered carefully. "In a way, yes. But *we* didn't kill MacDonald for it. Those who did kill him are the men who are after you now. They're afraid you might lead us to the stuff."

Hyrst swore, shaking with sudden anger. "Damn it, I won't be treated like a child. Not by you, by anyone: I want—"

"You want the men who killed MacDonald," said Shearing. "I

know: I remember what was in your mind when you met your son."

A weakness took Hyrst and he leaned his forehead against the cold stone wall.

"I'm sorry," said Shearing. "But we want what you want—and more. So much more that you can't dream it. You must trust us."

"Us? That woman?"

ONCE AGAIN in Shearing's mind Hyrst saw the woman with her head against the stars, and the ship looming darkly. He saw the woman much more clearly, and she was like a fire, burning with anger, burning with a single-minded, dedicated purpose. She was beautiful, and frightening.

"She, and others," said Shearing. "Listen. We must go soon. We're to be picked up, secretly. Will you trust us—or would you rather trust yourself to those who are hunting you?"

Hyrst was silent. Shearing said, "Well?"

"I'll go with you," said Hyrst.

They went out into the cold darkness, and Hyrst heard Shearing say in his mind, "I wouldn't try to run—"

*But it wasn't Shearing speaking in his mind now, it was a third man.*

"I wouldn't try to run—"

Frantically startled, Hyrst threw

out his mental vision and saw the men who stood around them in the the darkness, four men, three of them holding the wicked little weapons called bee-guns in their hands. The fourth man came closer, a dark slender man with a face like a fox, high-boned, narrow-eyed, smiling. It came to Hyrst that the three with weapons were only ordinary men, and that it was this fourth man whose mind had spoken.

He was speaking aloud now. "I want you alive, believe me—but there are endless gradations between alive and dead. My men are very accurate."

Shearing's face was suddenly drawn and exhausted. "Don't try anything," he warned Hyrst wearily. "He means it."

The dark man shook his head at Shearing. "This wasn't nice of you. You knew we had a particular interest in Mr. Hyrst." He turned to Hyrst and smiled. His teeth were small and very neat and white. "Did you know that Shearing has been keeping a shield over your mind as well as his? A little too large a task for him. When you jarred his mind open for an instant, it was all we needed to lead us here."

He went on. "Mr. Hyrst, my name is Vernon. We'd like you to come with us."

Vernon nodded to the three accurate men, and the whole little

group began to walk in the direction of the spaceport. Shearing seemed almost asleep on his feet now. It was as though he had expended all his energy on a task, and failed at it, and was now quiescent, like an empty well waiting to fill again.

"Where are we going?" Hyrst asked, and Vernon answered:

"To see a gentleman you've never heard of, in a place you've never been." He added, with easy friendliness, "Don't worry, Mr. Hyrst, we have nothing against *you*. You're new to this — ah — state of life. You shouldn't be asked to make decisions or agreements until you know both sides of the question. Mr. Shearing was taking an unfair advantage."

Remembering the dark hard purpose Shearing had let him see in his mind, Hyrst could not readily dispute that. But he put out an exploring probe in the direction of Vernon's mind.

It was shut tight.

They walked on, toward the spaceport gates.

### CHAPTER III

ALL SPACE was before him, hung with the many-colored lights of the stars, intensely brilliant in the black nothing. It was incredibly splendid, but it was too much like what he had looked at

with his cold unseeing eyes for fifty years. He looked down — down being relative to where he was standing in the blister-window — and saw the whole Belt swarming by under him like a drift of fireflies. He quivered inwardly with a chill vertigo, and turned away.

Vernon was talking aloud. He had been talking for some time. He was stretched out on a soft, deep lounge, smoking, pretending to sip from a tall glass.

"So you see, Mr. Hyrst, we can help you a lot. It's not easy for a Lazarite — for one of us — to get a job. I know. People have a — well, a *feeling*. Now Mr. Bellaver —"

"Where is Shearing?" asked Hyrst. He came and stood in the center of the room, with the soft lights in his eyes and the soft carpets under his feet. His mind reached out, uneasy and restless; but it seemed to be surrounded by a zone of fog that tangled and confused and deflected it. He could not find Shearing.

"We've been here for hours," he said. "Where is he?"

"Probably talking a deal with Mr. Bellaver. I wouldn't worry. As I was saying, Bellaver Incorporated is interested in men like you. We're the largest builders of spacecraft in the System, and we can afford —"

"I know all about it," said Hyrst impatiently. "Old Quentin

Bellaver was busy swallowing up his rivals when I went through the door."

"Then," said Vernon imperturbably, "you should realize how much we can do for you. Electronics is a vital branch—"

Hyrst moved erratically around the room, looking at things and not really seeing them, hearing Vernon's voice but not understanding what it said. He was growing more and more uneasy. It was as though someone was calling to him, urgently, but just out of earshot. He kept straining, with his ears and his mind, and Vernon's voice babbled on, and the barrier was like a wall around his thoughts.

They had been aboard this ship for a long time now, and he had not seen Shearing since they came through the hatch. It was not really a ship, of course. It had no power of its own, depending on powerful tugs to tow it. It was Walter Bellaver's floating pleasure-palace, and the damndest thing Hyrst had ever seen. Vernon said it could and often did accomodate three or four hundred guests in the utmost luxury. There was nobody aboard it now but Bellaver, Vernon, Hyrst and Shearing, the three very accurate men, and perhaps a dozen others including stewards and the crews of the tugs and Bellaver's yacht. It was named the *Happy Dream*, and it was presently

drifting in an excessively lonely orbit high above the ecliptic, between nothing and nowhere.

Vernon had been with him almost constantly. He was getting tired of Vernon. Vernon talked too much.

"Listen," he said. "You can stop selling Bellaver. I'm not looking for a job. Where's Shearing?"

"Oh, forget Shearing," said Vernon, impatient in his turn. "You never heard of him until a few days ago."

"He helped me."

"For reasons of his own."

"What's *your* reason? And Bellaver's?"

"Mr. Bellaver is interested in all social problems. And I'm a Lazarite myself, so naturally I have a sympathy for others like me." Vernon sat up, putting his glass aside on a low table. He had drunk hardly any of the contents.

"Shearing," he said, "is a member of a gang who some time ago stole a particular property of Bellaver Incorporated. You're not involved in the quarrel, Mr. Hyrst. I'd advise you, as a friend, to stay not involved."

Hyrst's mind and his ears were stretched and quivering, straining to hear a cry for help just a little too far away.

"What kind of a property?" asked Hyrst.

Vernon shrugged. The Bellavers

have never said what kind, for fairly obvious reasons."

"Something to do with ships?"

"I suppose so. It isn't important to me. Nor to you, Mr. Hyrst."

"Will you pour me a drink?" said Hyrst, pointing to the cellaret close beside Vernon. "Yes, that's fine. How long ago?"

"What?" asked Vernon, measuring whisky into a glass.

"The theft," said Hyrst, and threw his mind suddenly against the barrier. For one fleeting second he forced a crack in it. "Something over fifty—", said Vernon, and let the glass fall. He spun around from the cellaret and was halfway to his feet when Hyrst hit him. He hit him three or four times before he would stay down, and three or four more before he would lie quiet. Hyrst straightened up, breathing hard. His lip was bleeding and he wiped it with the back of his hand. "That was a little too big a job for *you*, Mr. Vernon," he said viciously. "Trying to keep my mind blanked and under control for hours." He stuffed a handkerchief into Vernon's mouth, and tied him up with his own cummerbund, and shoved him out of sight behind an enormous bed. Then he opened the door carefully, and went out.

ornate, with doors opening off it, and nothing to show what was behind them or which way to go. Hyrst stood still a minute, getting control of himself. The barrier no longer obscured his mind. He let it rove, finding that every time he did that it was easier, and the images clearer. He heard Shearing again, as he had heard him in that one second when Vernon's guard had faltered. His face became set and ugly. He began to move toward the stern of the *Happy Dream*.

Heavy metal-cloth curtains closed this end of the corridor. Beyond them was a ballroom in which only one dim light now burned, a vastness of black polished floors and crystal windows looking upon space. Hyrst's footsteps were hushed and swallowed up in whispering echoes. He made his way across to another set of curtains, edged between them with infinite caution, and found himself in the upper aisle of an amphitheater.

It was pitch dark where he was, and he stood perfectly still, exploring with his mind. He could not see any guards. The rows of empty seats were arranged in circles around a central pit, large enough for any entertainment Mr. Bellaver might decide to give. The pit was brilliantly lighted, and from somewhere lower down came the intermittent sound of voices.

THERE WAS nobody in the corridor. This was wide and



Also from the pit came Shearing's cries. Hyrst began to tremble with outrage and anger, and his still-uncertain mental control faltered dangerously. Then from out of nowhere, a voice spoke in his mind, and he saw the face of the woman he had seen twice before, the woman Shearing served.

"Careful," she said. "There is a Lazarite with Bellaver. His attention is all on Shearing, but you must keep your mind shielded. I'll help you."

Hyrst whispered. "Thanks." He felt calm now, alert and capable. He crept along the dark aisle, toward the pit.

Mr. Bellaver's theater lacked nothing. The large circular stage area was fitted with upper and lower electro-magnets for the use of acrobats and dancers with null-grav specialties. They could perform without disturbing the regular grav-field of the *Happy Dream*, thus keeping the guests comfortable, and by skillful manipulation of the magnetic fields more spectacular stunts were possible than in ordinary no-gravity.

Shearing was in the pit, between the upper and lower magnets. He wore an acrobat's metal attraction-harness, strapped on over his clothes. When Hyrst looked over the rail he was hanging at the central point of weightlessness, where everything in a man floats

free and his senses are lost in a dreadful vertigo unless he has been conditioned over a long period of time to get used to it. Shearing had not been conditioned.

"Careful," said the woman's warning voice in his mind. "His life depends on you. No, don't try to make contact with him! The Lazarite would sense you—"

Shearing began a slow ascension toward the upper magnet as the current was increased, from some unseen control board. He moved convulsively turning horizontally around the axis of his own middle like a toy spun on a string. His back was uppermost, and Hyrst could not see his face.

"Bellaver and the Lazarite," said the woman quietly, "are trying to learn from Shearing where our ship is. He has been able so far to keep his mind shielded. He is—a very brave man. But you'll have to hurry. He's near the breaking point."

Shearing was now almost level with Hyrst, suspended over that open pit, looking down, a long way.

"You'll have to be quick, Hyrst. Please. Please get him out of there before we have to kill him."

The current in the magnet was cut and Shearing fell, with a long neighing scream.

**H**YRST looked down. The repelling force of the lower mag-

net cushioned the fall, and the upper magnet took hold, hard. Shearing stopped about three feet above the stage floor and started slowly to rise again. He seemed to be crying. Hyrst turned and ran back to the top of the aisle. Halfway around the circle he found steps and went tearing down them. On the next level — there were three — he saw two men leaning over the broad rail, watching Shearing.

"Yes, there they are. You must find a weapon —"

Hyrst looked around, blinking like a mole in the dark. Seats, nothing but seats. Ornamentation, but all solid. Small metal cylinder, set in a wall niche. Chemical extinguisher. Yes. Compact and heavy. He took it.

"Hurry. He's almost through—"

The two men were tense and hungry, eager as wolves. One was the Lazarite, a grey man, old and seamed with living and none of it good. The other was Bellaver, and he was young. He was tall and fresh-faced, impeccably shaven, impeccably dressed, the keen, clean, public-spirited executive.

"I can give you more if you want it, Shearing," Bellaver said, his fingers ready on a control-plate set into the broad rail. "How about it?"

"Shut up, Bellaver," whispered the Lazarite aloud. "I've almost got it. Almost—" His face was

agonized with concentration.

"Now!"

The woman's voiceless cry in his mind sent Hyrst forward. His hand swung up and then down in a crashing arc, elongated by the heavy cylinder. The Lazarite fell without a sound. He fell across Bellaver, pushing him back from the control-plate, and lay over his feet, bleeding gently into the thick pile of the carpet. Bellaver's mouth and eyes opened wide. He looked at the Lazarite and then at Hyrst. He leaped backward, away from the encumbrance at his ankles, making the first hoarse effort at a shout for help. Hyrst did not give him time to finish it. The first row of seats caught Bellaver and threw him, and Hyrst swung the cylinder again. Bellaver collapsed.

"Was I in time?" Hyrst asked of the woman, in his mind. He thought she was crying when she answered, "Yes." He smiled. He stepped over the Lazarite and went to the control-plate and began to work with it until he had Shearing safely on the floor of the stage. Then he cut the power and ran down another flight of steps to the bottom level. His mind was able to range free now. He could not sense anyone close at hand. Bellaver seemed to have sent underlings elsewhere in the *Happy Dream* while he worked on Shearing. It was nothing for which a

man would seek witnesses. Hyrst vaulted the rail onto the stage and dragged Shearing away from the magnet. He felt uncomfortable in all that glare of light. He hauled and grunted until he got Shearing over the rail into the dark. Then he wrestled the harness off him. Shearing sobbed feebly, and retched.

"Can you stand up?" said Hyrst. "Hey. Shearing." He shook him, hard. "Stand up."

He got Shearing up; a one-hundred-and-ninety pound rag doll draped over his shoulders. He began to walk him out of the theater. "Are you still there?" he asked of the woman.

The answer came into his mind swiftly. "Yes. I'll help you watch. Do you see where the skiff is?"

It was in a pod under the belly of the *Happy Dream*. "I see it," said Hyrst.

"Take that. Bellaver's yacht is faster, but you'd need the crew. The skiff you can handle yourself."

**H**E WALKED Shearing into a fore-and-aft corridor. Shearing's feet were beginning to move of their own accord, and he had stopped retching. But his eyes were still blank and he staggered aimlessly. Hyrst's nerves were prickling with a mixture of fierce satisfaction and fear. Far above in the lush suite he felt Vernon stir and

come to. There were men somewhere closer, quite close. He forced his mind to see. Two of the very accurate men who had been with Vernon were playing cards with two others who were apparently stewards. The third one lolled in a chair, smoking. All five were in a lounge just around the corner of a transverse corridor. The door was open.

Without realizing that he had done so, Hyrst took control of Shearing's mind: "Steady, now. We're going past that corner without a sound. You hear me, Shearing? Not a sound."

Shearing's eyes flickered vaguely. He frowned, and his step became steadier. The floor of the corridor was covered in a tough resilient plastic that deadened footsteps. They passed the corner. The men continued to play cards. Hyrst sent up a derisive insult to Vernon and told Shearing to hurry a little. The stair leading down into the pod was just ahead, ten yards, five —

A man appeared in the corridor ahead, coming from some store-room with a rack of plastic bottles in his hand.

"You'll have to run now," came the woman's thought, coolly. "Don't panic. You can still make it."

The man with the bottles yelled. He began to run toward Hyrst and Shearing, dropping the rack to

leave his hands free. In the lounge-room behind them the card-party broke up. Hyrst took Shearing by the arm and clamped down even tighter on his mind, giving him a single command. They ran together, fast.

The men from the lounge poured out into the main corridor. Their voices were confused and very loud. Ahead, the man who had been bringing the bottles was now between Hyrst and the stair. He was a brown, hard man who looked like a pilot. He said, "You better stop," and then he grappled with Hyrst and Shearing. The three of them spun around in a clumsy dance, Shearing moving like an automaton, Hyrst and the pilot flailing away with their fists, and then the pilot fell back hard on the seat of his pants, with the blood bursting out of his nose and his eyes glazing. Hyrst raced for the stair, propelling Shearing. They tumbled down it with a shot from a bee-gun buzzing over their heads. It was a short stair with a double-hatch door at the bottom. They fell through it, and Hyrst slammed it shut almost on the toes of a man coming down the stair behind them. The automatic lock took hold. Hyrst told Shearing, "You can stop now."

A few minutes later, from the great swag belly of the *Happy Dream*, a small space-skiff shot

away and was quickly lost in the star-shot immensity above the Belt.

## CHAPTER IV

IT DID NOT stay lost for long. Shearing was at the controls. The chronometer showed fourteen hours and twenty-seven minutes since they left the *Happy Dream*. Shearing had spent eight of those hours in a species of comatose slumber, from which he had roused out practically normal. Now Hyrst was heavily asleep in the pneumo-chair beside him.

Shearing punched him. "Wake up."

After several more punches Hyrst groaned and opened his eyes. He mumbled a question, and Shearing pointed out the wide curved port that gave full vision forward and on both sides.

"It was a good try," he said, "but I don't think we're going to make it. Look there. No, farther back. See it? Now the other side. And there's one astern."

Still sleepy, but alarmed, Hyrst swung his mental vision around. It was easier than looking. Two fast, powerful tugs from the *Happy Dream*, and Bellaver's yacht. He frowned in heavy concentration. "Bellaver's aboard. He's got a mighty goose-egg on his head. Vernon too, with his shields up tight. The three accurate men and the

pilot—his nose is a thing of beauty—plus crew. Nine in all. Two men each to the tugs. The other Lazarite, the one I laid out—he's not along."

Shearing nodded approvingly. "You're getting good. Now take a glance at our fuel-tanks and tell me what you see."

Hyrst sat up straight, fully awake. "Practically," he said, "nothing."

"This skiff was meant for short hops only. We've got enough for perhaps another forty-five minutes, less if we get too involved. They're faster than we are, so they'll catch up to us—oh, say in about half an hour. We have friends coming—"

"Friends?"

"Certainly. You don't think we let each other down, do you? Not the brotherhood. But they had to come from a long way off. We can't possibly rendezvous under an hour and a half, maybe more if—"

"I know," said Hyrst. "If we all get involved." He looked out the port. In the beginning, following directions from the young woman—whose name he had never thought to ask—he had set a course that plunged him deep into one of the wildest sectors of the Belt. He was not a pilot. He could, like most men of his time, handle a simple craft under simple conditions, but

these conditions were not simple. The skiff's radar was short-range and it had no automatic deflection reflexes. Hyrst had had to fly on ESP, spotting meteor swarms, asteroids, debris of all sorts in this poetically named hell-hole, the Path of Minor Worlds, and then figuring out how to get by, through, or over then without a crash. Shearing had relieved him just in time.

He glowered at the whirling, glittering mess outside, the dust, the shards and fragments of a shattered world. It merged into mist and his mind was roving again. Shearing jockeyed the controls. He was flying esper too. The tugs and Bellaver's fast yacht were closing up the gap. The level in the tanks went down, used up not in free fall but in the constant maneuvering. Hyrst swung mentally inboard to check vac-suits and equipment in the locker, and then out again. His vision was strong and free. He could look at the Sun, and see the splendid fires of the corona. He could look at Mars, old and cold and dried-up, and at Jupiter, massive and sullen and totally useless except as an anchor for its family of crazy moons. He could look farther than that. He could look at the stars. In a little while, he thought, he could look at whole galaxies. His heart pounded and the

breath came hot and hard into his lungs. It was a good feeling. It made all that had gone before almost worthwhile. The primal immensities drew him, the black gulfs lit with gold and crimson and peacock-colored flames. He wanted to go farther and farther, into—

"You're learning too fast," said Shearing dryly. "Stick to something small and close and sordid, namely an asteroid where we can land."

"I found one," said Hyrst. "There."

**S**HEARING followed his mental nudge. "Hell," he said, "couldn't you have spotted something better? These Valhallas give me the creeps."

"The others within reach are too small, or there's no cover. We'll have quite a little time to wait. I take it you would like to be alive, when your friends come."

Vernon's thought broke in on them abruptly. "You have just one chance of that, and that's to give yourselves up, right now."

"Does the socially-conscious Mr. Bellaver still want to give me that job?" asked Hyrst.

"I'm warning you," said Vernon.

"Your mind is full of hate," said Hyrst. "Cleanse it." He shut Vernon out as easily as hanging up a

phone. Under stress, his new powers were developing rapidly. He felt a little drunk with them. Shearing said, "Don't get above yourself, boy. You're still a cub, you know." Then he grinned briefly and added, "By the way, thanks."

Hyrst said, "I owed it to you. And you can thank your lady friend, too. She had a big hand in it."

"Christina," said Shearing softly. "Yes."

He dropped the skiff sharply in a descending curve, toward the asteroid.

"Do you think," said Hyrst, "you could now tell me what the devil this is all about?"

Shearing said, "We've got a starship."

Hyrst stared. For a long time he didn't say anything. Then, "You've got a starship? But nobody has! People talk of someday reaching other stars, but nobody tried yet, nobody *could* try—" He broke off, suddenly remembering a dark, lonely ship, and a woman with angry eyes watching it. Even in his astonishment, things began to come clearer to him. "So that's it—a starship. And Bellaver wants it?"

Shearing nodded.

"Well," said Hyrst. "Go on."

"You've already developed some amazing mental capabilities since you came back from beyond the door. You'll find that's only the be-



ginning. The radiation, the exposure—something. The simple act of pseudo-death, perhaps. Anyway, the brain is altered, stepped up, a great deal of its normally unused potential released. You've always been a fair-to-middling-technician. You'll find your rating boosted, eventually, to the genius level."

The skiff veered wildly as Shearing dodged a whizzing chunk of rock the size of a skyscraper.

"That's one reason," he said, "why we wanted to get you before Bellaver did. The number of technicians undergoing the Humane Penalty is quite small. We—the brotherhood—need all of them we can get."

"But that wasn't the main reason you wanted me?" pressed Hyrst.

Shearing looked at him. "No. We wanted you mainly because you were present when MacDonald died. Handled right—"

He paused. The asteroid was rushing at them, and Bellaver's ships were close behind. Hyrst was already in a vac-suit, all but the helmet.

"Take the controls," said Shearing. "As she goes. Don't worry, I'll make the landing." He pulled the vac-suit on. "Handled right," he said, "you might be the key to that murder, and to the mystery behind it that the brotherhood *must*

solve."

He took the controls again. They helped each other on with their helmets. The asteroid filled the port, a wild, weird jumble of varicolored rock.

"I don't see how," said Hyrst, into his helmet mike.

"Latent impressions," answered Shearing briefly, and sent the skiff skittering in between two great black monoliths, to settle with a jar on a pan of rock as smooth and naked as a ballroom floor.

"Make it fast," said Shearing. "They're right on top of us."

THE SKIFF, designed as Shearing had said for short hops, could not accomodate the extra weight and bulk of an air-lock. You were supposed to land in atmosphere. If you didn't, you just pushed a release-button and hung on. The air was exhausted in one whistling swoosh that took with it everything loose. The moisture in it crystallized instantly, and before this frozen drift had even begun to settle, Hyrst and Shearing were on their way.

They crossed the rock pan in great swaggering bounds. The gravity was light, the horizon only twenty or so miles away. Literally in his mind's eye Hyrst could see the three ships arrowing at them. He opened contact with Vernon,

knowing Shearing had done so too. Vernon had been looking for them.

"Mr. Bellaver still prefers to have you alive," he said. "If you'll wait quietly beside the skiff, we'll take you aboard."

Shearing gave him a hard answer.

"Very well," said Vernon. "Mr. Bellaver wants me to make it clear to you that he doesn't intend for you to get away. So you can interpret that as you please. Be seeing you."

He broke contact, knowing that Hyrst and Shearing would close him out. From now on, Hyrst realized, he would keep track of them the way he and Shearing had kept track of obstructions in the path of flight, by mental "sight". The yacht was extremely close. Suddenly Hyrst had a confused glimpse of a hand on a control-lever overlapped by a view of the black-mouthed tubes of the yacht's belly-jets. He dived, literally, into a crack between one of the monoliths and a slab that leaned against its base, dragging Shearing with him.

The yacht swept over. Nothing happened. It dropped out of sight, braking for a landing.

"Imagination," said Shearing. "You realize a possibility, and you think it's so. Tricky. But I don't blame you. The safe side is the best one."

Hyrst looked out the crack. One of the tugs was coming in to land beside the skiff, while the other one circled.

"Now what?" he said. "I suppose we can dodge them for a while, but we can't hide from Vernon."

Shearing chuckled. He had got his look of tough competence back. He seemed almost to be enjoying himself. "I told you you were only a cub. How do you suppose we've kept the starship hidden all these years? Watch."

In the flick of a second Hyrst went blind and deaf. Then he realized that it was only his mental eyes and ears that were blanked out as though a curtain had been drawn across them. His physical eyes were still clear and sharp, and when Shearing's voice came over the helmet audio he heard it without trouble.

"This is called the cloak. I suppose you could call it an extension of the shield, though it's more like a force field. It's no bar to physical vision, and it has the one great disadvantage of being opaque both ways to mental energy. But it does act as a deflector. If Vernon follows us now, he'll have to do it the hard way. Stick close by me, so I don't have too wide a spread. And it'll be up to you to lead. I can't do both. Let's go."

Hyrst had, unconsciously, become so used to his new perceptions that it made him feel dull and helpless to be without them. He led off down one of the smooth rock avenues, going away from the skiff and the tug which had just landed.

On either side of the avenue were monoliths, irregularly spaced and of different sizes and heights but following an apparently orderly plan. The light of the distant sun lay raw and blinding on them, casting shadows as black and sharp-edged as though drawn upon the rock with india ink.

You could see faces in the monoliths. You could see mighty outlines, singly and in groups, of gods and beasts and men, in combat, in supplication, in death and burial. That was why these asteroids were called Valhallas. Twenty-six of them had been found so far, and studied, and still no one could say certainly whether or not the hands of any living beings had fashioned them. They might be actual monuments, defaced by cosmic dust, by collision with the myriad fragments of the Belt, by time. They might be one of Nature's casual jokes, created by the same agencies. No actual tombs had been found, nor tools, nor definitely identifiable artifacts. But still the feeling persisted, in the airless silence of

the avenues, that some passing race had paused and wrought for itself a memorial more enduring than its fame, and then gone on into the great galactic sea, never to return.

**H**YRST had never been on a Valhalla before. He understood why Shearing had not wanted to land and he wished now that they hadn't. There was something overwhelmingly sad and awesome about these leaning, towering figures of stone, moving forever in their lonely orbit, going nowhere, returning to nowhere.

Then he saw the second tug overhead. He forgot his daydreams. "They're going to act as a spotter," he said. Shearing grunted but did not speak. His whole mind was concentrated on maintaining the cloak. Hyrst stopped him still in the pitchy shadow under what might have been a kneeling woman sixty feet high. He watched the tug. It lazied away, circling slowly, and he did not think it had seen them. He could not any longer see the place where they had landed, but he assumed that, by now the yacht had looped back and come in—if not there somewhere close by. They could figure on nine to eleven men hunting them, depending on whether they left the ships guarded or not. Either way, it was too many.

"Listen," he said aloud to Shearing. "Listen, I want to ask you. What you said about latent impressions—you think I might have seen and heard the killer even though I was unconscious?"

"Especially heard. Possible. With your increased power, and ours, impressions received through sense-channels but not recognized at the time or remembered later might be recovered." He shook his head. "Don't bother me."

"I just wanted to know," said Hyrst. He thought of his son, and the two daughters he hoped he would never see. He thought of Elena. It was too late to do anything for her, but the others were still living. So was he, and he intended to stay that way, at least until he had done what he set out to do.

"Old Bellaver was behind that killing, wasn't he? Old Quentin, this one's grandfather."

"Yes. Don't bother me."

"One thing more. Do we Lazarites live longer than men?"

Shearing gave him a curious, brief look. "Yes."

The tug was out of sight behind a massive rearing shape that seemed to clutch a broken ship between its paws. Symbolic, perhaps, of space? Who knew? Hyrst led Shearing in wild impala-like leaps across an open space, and into a

narrow way that twisted, filled with darkness, among the bases of a group that resembled an outlandish procession following a king.

"How much longer?"

"Humane Penalty first came in a hundred and fourteen years ago, right? After Seitz' method was perfected for saving spacemen. I was one of the first they used it on."

"My God," said Hyrst. Yet, somehow, he was not as surprised as he might have been.

"I've aged," said Shearing apologetically. "I was only twenty-seven then."

They crouched, beside a humped shape like a gigantic lizard with a long tail. The tug swung overhead and slowly on.

Hyrst said, "Then it's possible the one who killed MacDonald is still alive?"

"Possible. Probable."

Hyrst bared his teeth, in what was not at all like a smile. "Good," he said. "That makes me happy."

They did not do any talking after that. They had had their helmet radios operating on practically no power at all, so that they couldn't be picked up outside a radius of a few yards, but even that might be too close, now that Bellaver's men had had time to get suited and fan out. They shut them off entirely, communicating by yanks and nudges.

FOR WHAT seemed to Hyrst like a very long time, but which was probably less than half an hour in measured minutes, they dodged from one patch of shadow to another, following an erratic course that Hyrst thought would lead them away from the ships. Once more the tug went over, slow, and then Hyrst didn't see it again. The idea that they might have given up occurred to him but he dismissed it as absurd. With the helmet mike shut off, the silence was beginning to get on his nerves. Once he looked up and saw a piece of cosmic debris smash into a monolith. Dust and splinters flew, and a great fragment broke off and fell slowly downward, bumping and rebounding, and all of it as soundless as a dream. You couldn't hear yourself walk, you couldn't hear anything but the roar of your own breathing and the pounding of your own blood. The grotesque rocky avenues could hide an army, stealthy, creeping—

There was a hill, or at least a higher eminence, crowned with what might have been the cyclopean image of a man stretched out on a noble catafalque, with hooded giants standing by in attitudes of mourning. It seemed like the best place to stop that Hyrst had seen, with plenty of cover and a view of the surrounding area. With luck,

you might stay hidden there a long time. He jogged Shearing's elbow and pointed, and Shearing nodded. There was a wide, almost circular sweep of open rock around the base of the hill. Hyrst looked carefully for the tug. There was no sign of it. He tore out across the open, with Shearing at his heels.

The tug swooped over, going fast this time. It could not possibly have missed them. Shearing dropped the cloak with a grunt. "No use for that any more," he said. They bounded up the hillside and in among the mourning figures. The tug whipped around in a tight spiral and hung over the hill. Hyrst shook the sweat out of his eyes. His mind was clear again. The tug's skipper was babbling into his communicator, and in another place on the asteroid Hyrst could mentally see a thin skirmish line spread out, and in still another four men in a bunch. They all picked up and began to move, toward the hill.

Shearing said, nodding spaceward, "Our friends are on the way. If we can hold out—"

"Fat chance," said Hyrst. "They're armed, and all we've got is flare-pistols." But he looked around. His eyes detected nothing but rock, hard sunlight, and deep shadow, but his mind saw that

one of the black blots at the base of the main block, the catafalque, was more than a shadow. He slid into a crack that resembled a passage, being rounded rather than ragged. Shearing was right behind him. "I don't like this," he said, "but I suppose there's no help for it."

The crack led down into a cave, or chamber, too irregularly shaped to be artificial, too smoothly surfaced and floored to be natural. There was nothing in it but a block of stone, nine feet or so long and about four feet wide by five feet high. It seemed to be a natural part of the floor, but Hyrst avoided it. On the opposite, the sunward side, there was a small windowlike aperture that admitted a ray of blinding radiance, sharply defined and doing nothing to illumine the dark on either side of it.

Vernon's thought came to them, hard, triumphant, peremptory. "Mr. Bellaver says you have ten minutes to come out. After that, no, mercy."

## CHAPTER V

THE MINUTES slid past, sections of eternity arbitrarily measured by the standards of another planet and having no relevance at all on this tiny whirling rock. The beam of light from the

small aperture moved visibly across the opposite wall. Hyrst watched it, blinking. Outside, Bellaver's men were drawn up in a wide crescent across the hill in front of the catafalque. They waited.

"No mercy," said Hyrst softly. "No mercy, is it?" He bent over and began to loosen the clamps that held the lead weights to the soles of his boots.

"It isn't mercy we need," said Shearing. "It's time."

"How much?"

"Look for yourself."

Hyrst shifted his attention to space. There was a ship in it, heading toward the asteroid, and coming fast. Hyrst frowned, doing in his head without thinking about it a calculation that would have required a computer in his former life.

"Twenty-three minutes and seventeen seconds," he said, "inclusive of the four remaining."

He finished getting the weights off his boots. He handed one to Shearing. Then he half-climbed, half-floated up the wall and settled himself above the entrance, where there was a slight concavity in the rock to give him hold.

"Shearing," he said.

"What?" He was settling himself beside the mouth of the crack, where a man would have to come clear inside to get a shot at him.

"A starship implies the intention



to go to the stars. Why haven't you?"

"For the simplest reason in the world," said Shearing bitterly. "The damn thing can't fly."

"But—" said Hyrst, in astonishment.

"It isn't finished. It's been building for over seventy years now, and a long and painful process that's been, too, Hyrst — doing it bit by bit in secret, and every bit having to be dreamed up out of whole cloth, and often discarded and dreamed up again, because the principle of a workable star-drive has never been formulated before. And it still isn't finished. It can't be finished, unless—"

He stopped, and both men turned their attention to the outside.

"Bellaver's looking at his chrono," said Hyrst. "Go ahead, we've got a minute."

Shearing continued, "unless we can get hold of enough Titanite to build the hyper-shift relays. Nothing else has a fast enough reaction time, and the necessary load-capacity. We must have burned out a thousand different test-boards, trying."

"Can't you buy it?" asked Hyrst. The question sounded reasonable, but he knew as he said it that it was a foolish one. "I mean, I know the stuff is scarcer than virtue and worth astronomical sums — that's what MacDonald

was so happy about — but —"

"The Bellaver Corporation had a corner on the stuff before our ship was even thought of. That's what brought this whole damned mess about. Some of our people — not saying why they wanted it, of course — tried to buy some from Bellaver in the usual way, and one of them must have been incautious about his shield. Because a Lazarite working for Bellaver caught a mental hint of the starship, and the reason for the Titanite, and that was it. Three generations of Bellavers have been after us for the star-drive, and it's developed into a secret war as bitter as any ever fought on the battlefield. They hold all the Titanite, we hold the ship, and perhaps now you're beginning to see why MacDonald was killed, and why you're so important to both sides."

"Beginning to," said Hyrst. "But only beginning."

"MacDonald found a Titanite pocket. And as you know, a Titanite pocket isn't very big. One man can break the crude stuff, fill a sack with it, and tote it on his own back if he doesn't have a power-sled."

"MacDonald had a sled."

"And he used it. He cleaned out his pocket, afraid somebody else would track him to it, and he hid the wretched ore somewhere. Then he began to dicker. He approach-

ed the Bellaver Corporation, and we heard of it and approached *him*. He tried playing us off against Bellaver to boost the price, and suddenly he was dead and you were accused of his murder. We thought you really had done it, because no Titanite turned up, and we knew Bellaver hadn't gotten it from him. We'd watched too closely. It wasn't until some years later that one of our people learned that MacDonald had threatened a little too loudly to sell to us unless Bellaver practically tripled his offer — and of course Bellaver didn't dare do that. A price so much out of line even for Titanite would have stirred all the rival shipbuilders to unwelcome curiosity. So, we figured, Bellaver had had him killed."

"But what happened to the Titanite?"

"That," said Shearing, "is what nobody knows. Bellaver must have figured that if his tame Lazarites couldn't find where MacDonald had put it, we couldn't either. He was right. With all our combined mental probes and conventional detectors we haven't been able to track it down. And we haven't been able to find any more pockets, either. Bellaver Corporation got exclusive mineral rights to the whole damned moon. They even own the refinery now."

Hyrst shook his head. "Latent

impressions or not, I don't see how I can help on that. If MacDonald had given the killer any clue —"

A BEAM of bright blue light no thicker than a pencil struck in through the mouth of the passage. It touched the side of the large stone block. The stone turned molten and ran, and then the beam flicked off, leaving a place that glowed briefly red. Shearing said, "I guess our ten minutes are up."

They were. For a second or two nothing more happened and then Hyrst saw something come sailing in through the crack. His mind told him what it was just barely in time to shut his eyes. There was a flash that dazzled him even through his closed lids, and the flash became a glare that did not lessen. Bellaver's men had tossed in a long-term flare, and almost at once someone followed it, in the hope of catching Hyrst and Shearing blinded and off guard. The eyes of Hyrst's mind, unaffected by light, clearly showed him the suited figure just below him, with its bubble helmet covered by a glare-shield. They directed him with perfect accuracy in the downward sweep of the lead weight he had taken from his boot, and which he still held in his hand. The bubble helmet was very strong, and the gravity very light, but the concussion was enough to drop the man unconscious. Just about

thought Hyrst, what happened to me there in the hoist tower, when MacDonald died. Shearing, who had by now adjusted his own glare-shield stooped quickly and took the man's gun.

He said aloud, over the helmet communicator, "The next one that steps through here gets it. Do you hear that, Bellaver?"

Bellaver's voice answered. "Listen, Shearing, I was wrong. I admit it. Let's calm down and start over again. I—"

"Ten minutes ago it was no mercy."

"It's hard for me to behave reasonably about this business. You know what it means to me, what it meant to my father and *his* father. But I'm willing to do anything, Shearing, if you'll make a deal."

"I'll make a deal. Readily. Eagerly. Give back what your grandfather stole from us, and we'll call it square."

"Oh no, we won't," said Hyrst grimly, breaking in. "Not until I find who killed MacDonald."

"All-right," said Bellaver. "Wilson, break out the grenades."

The entire surface of Hyrst's body burst into a flaring sweat. For one panic-stricken second he wanted to rush out the crack pleading for mercy. Then he got his feet against the wall and pushed hard, and went plunging across the chamber in a sort of floating dive.

Shearing got there at the same time and helped to pull him down. They huddled together on the floor, with the coffin-shaped block between them and the crack. Hyrst sent out a frantic mental call to hurry, directed at the spaceship of the brotherhood.

"They're all going to hurry," said Shearing. "Vernon has found the ship now. He's telling Bellaver. Here comes the grenade—"

Small round glittering thing of death, curving light and graceful through the airless gloom. It comes so slowly, and the flesh shrinks quivering upon itself until it is nothing more than a handful of simple fear. Outside the men are running away, and the one who has thrown the grenade from the cramped, constructing vantage of the crack is running after them, and Shearing is crying with his mind Will it to fall short, *will it to fall short*—

There is a great brilliance, and the rock leaps, but there is not the slightest sound.

## CHAPTER VI

*"The Ram, the Bull, the Heavenly Twins,  
And next the Crab the Lion  
Shine.*

*The Virgin and the Scales—"*

The old zodiacal rhyme was running through Hyrst's mind, and

that was the only thing that was in his mind.

The Virgin and the Scales.

Yes. And she's very beautiful, too, thought Hyrst. But she shouldn't be *holding* the Scales. That's all wrong. The Scales come next, and then the Scorpion—Scorpio—and the Archer—Sagittarius—

And anyway they aren't scales, they're a pair of big golden stars, and she's putting them down, and they're melting together. There's only one of them, and it's not a star at all, really. It's a polished metal jug, reflecting the light, and —

The Virgin smiled. "The doctor said you were coming around. I brought you something to drink."

Reality returned to Hyrst with a rush. "You're Christina," he said, and tried to sit up. He was dizzy, and she helped him, and he said, "I guess it did fall short."

"What?"

"The grenade. The last thing I remember is Shearing — Wait. Where is Shearing?"

"Sitting up in the lounge, nursing his bruises. Yes, it fell short, but I don't think telekinetics had much to do with that. We've never been able to control matter convincingly. There. All right?"

"Fine. How did you get us out?"

"Of course the grenade had made the entrance impassible—we

had to cut our way in through the outer wall. We had a clear field. Bellaver's men had all gone back to their ships. They thought you were dead, and to tell you the truth we thought you must be, too. But you didn't quite 'feel' dead, so we dug you out."

"Thanks," said Hyrst. "I suppose they know different now."

He was in a ship's sick-bay. From the erratic crash and shudder of the lateral jets, they were beating their way through the Belt, and at a high rate of speed. Hyrst sent a glance back into space. The tugs and Bellaver's yacht were following, but this time only the yacht had a chance. The tugs were dropping hopelessly behind.

"Yes, they soon found out once we got you out, but with any luck we'll lose them," said Christina. She sat down beside the bunk, where she could see his face. "Shearing told you about the ship."

"The starship. Yes." He looked at her. Suddenly he laughed. "You're not a goddess at all."

"Who said I was?"

"Shearing. Or anyway, his mind. Ten feet tall, and crowned with stars — I was afraid of you." He leaned closer. "Your eyes, though. They are angry."

"So will yours be," she said, "when you've fought the Bellavers as long as we have."

"There are still things I don't understand. Why you built the ship, why you've kept it secret from everyone, not just Bellaver, what you plan to do with it — how *you* came to be one of the Brotherhood."

She smiled. "The Seitz method was originated to save wreck-victims frozen in deep space. Remember? Quite a few of us never went through the door at all, innocent or guilty. But that makes no difference, once you've come back from out there." She put her hand on his. "You've learned fast, but you're only on the threshold. There's no need for words with us. Open your mind—"

HE DID SO. At first it was no different from the contact he had had with Shearing's mind, or with Christina's before on the *Happy Dream*. Thoughts came to him clearly phrased — *You want to know why we built the ship, what we plan to do with it—* and it was only after some time that he realized the words had stopped and he was receiving Christina's emotions, her memories and opinions, her disappointments and her dreams, as simply and directly as though they were his own.

You haven't had time yet, they told him without words, to realize how alone you are. You haven't tried, as most of us do at first, to

be human again, to fit yourself into life as though the gap of time was not there, as though nothing had changed. You haven't watched people getting old around you while you have hardly added a gray hair. You haven't had to move from one place to another, one job, one group of friends to another, because sooner or later they sense something wrong about you. You haven't had to hide your new powers as you would hide a disease because people would fear and hate you, perhaps even kill you, if they knew. That's why there is a brotherhood. And that's why we built the ship.

Symbol of flight. Symbol of freedom. A universe wide beyond imagining, thronging with many colored guns, with new worlds where men in a human society could build a society of their own. *No boundaries beyond which the mind cannot dare to go. All space, all time, all knowledge—free!*

Once more he saw those wide dark seas between the suns. His mind raced with hers through the cold-flaming nebulae, wheeled blinded and stunned past the living stars of Hercules, looked in eager fascination at the splendid spiral of Andromeda — no longer, perhaps, beyond reach, for what are time and space to the intangible forces of the mind?

Then that wild flight ceased, and

instead there was a smaller vision, misty and only half realized, of houses and streets, a place where they could live and be what they were, openly and without fear.

*Can you understand now, she asked him, what they would think if they knew about the ship? Can you understand that they would be afraid to have us colonizing out there, afraid of what we might do?*

He understood. At the very least, if the truth were known, the Lazarites would never be free again. They would be taken and tested and examined and lectured about, legislated over, restricted, governed, and used. They might be fairly paid for their ship and whatever other advancements they might develop, but they would never be permitted to use them.

With sudden savage eagerness Hyrst said, "But first of all I must know who killed MacDonald. Shearing explained about the latent impressions. I'm ready."

She stood up, regarding him with grave eyes. "There's no guarantee it will work. Sometimes it does. Sometimes not."

Hyrst thought about the tired, gray-haired man who had stood at the foot of his bed. "It'll work. It's got to."

He added, "If it doesn't, I'll tear the truth out of Bellaver with my hands."

"It may come to that," she said

grimly. "But we'll hope. Lie quiet. I'll make the arrangements."

An hour later Hyrst lay on the padded table in the middle of the sick-bay. The ship spun and whirled and leaped in a sort of insane dance, and Hyrst was strapped to the table to prevent his being thrown off. He had known that the ship was maneuvering in the thickest swarm area of the Belt with four pilots mind-linked and flying esper, trying to out-dare Bellaver. Two others were keeping Vernon blanked, and they hoped that either Bellaver himself or his radar-deflector system would give up. Hyrst had known this, but now he was no longer interested. He was barely conscious of the lurching of the ship. They had given him some sort of a drug, and he lay relaxed and pliant in a pleasant suspension of all worries, looking vaguely up at the faces that were bent over him. Finally he closed his eyes, and even they were gone.

HE was crossing the plain of methane snow with MacDonald, under the glowing Rings. At first it was all a little blurred, but gradually the memory cleared until he was aware of each tiny detail far more clearly than he had been at the time—the texture of the material from which MacDonald's suit was made, the infinitesimal shadow underscoring every

roughness of the snow, the exact sensation of walking in his leaded boots, the whisper and whistle of his oxygen system. He quarrelled again with MacDonald, not missing a word. He climbed with him into the tower of Number Three hoist and examined the signal lights, and sat down on the bench, smiling, to wait.

He sweated inside his suit. He would take a shower when he got back to quarters. He wished for a smoke. MacDonald's steady grumbling and cursing filled his helmet. He listened, enjoying it. Hope you bang yourself with your own clumsy hammer. And I wish you joy of your fortune. If you have as many friends rich as you had poor you won't have any. There was an itch under his left arm. He pressed the suit in with his right and wriggled his body against it. It didn't do any good. Damn suits. Damn Titan. Lucky Elena, back on Earth with the kids. Making good money, though. Won't be long before I can go back and live like a human being. Now his nose itched, and MacDonald was still grumbling. There was the faintest ghost of a sound and then *crack*, then nothing, dark, cold, sinking, very weak, gone. Nothing, nothing. I come to in the cold silence and look down the shaft at MacDonald and he is dead.

*Go back a bit. Slow. That's*

*right. Easy. Back to Elena and the kids.*

Lucky Elena, in the sun and the warm sweet air. Lucky kids. But I'm lucky too. I can go back to them soon. My nose itches. Why does your nose always itch when you've got a helmet on, or your hands all over grease? Listen to MacDonald, damning the belt, damning the tools, damning everything in sight. Is that a footstep? The air is thin and poisonous, but it carries sound. Somebody coming behind me? Split second, no time to look or think. *Crack*. Cold. Dark. Nothing.

*Let's go back again. Don't hurry. We've all the time in the world. Go back to the footsteps you heard behind you.*

Almost heard. And then I black and cold. Heavy. Flat. Face heavy against helmet, cold. Lying down. Must get up, must get up, danger. Far away. Can't. MacDonald is screaming. Let the lift alone, what are you doing, Hyrst? Hyrst! Shut up, you greedy little man, and listen. You're not Hyrst—who are you? That doesn't matter. I know, you're from Bellaver. Bellaver sent you to steal the Titanite. Well, you won't get it. It's where nobody will ever get it unless I show them how. Good. That's good, MacDonald. That's what I wanted to know. You see, *we* don't need the Titanite.



MacDonald screams again, and the lift goes down with a roar and a rattle of severed chain.

Heavy footsteps, shaking the floor by my head. Someone turns me over, speaks to me, bending close. Light is gray and strange. I try to rouse, I can't. The man is satisfied. He drops me and goes away, but I have seen his face inside his helmet. I hear him working on some metal thing with a tool. He is whistling a little under his breath. MacDonald is not screaming now. From time to time he whimpers. But I have seen the killer's face.

I have seen his face.

I have seen —

*Take it easy, Hyrst. Take your time.*

Elena is dead, and this is Christina bending over me.

I have seen the killer's face.

It is the face of Vernon.

## CHAPTER VII

THERE WAS Christina, and there was Shearing, and there were two more he did not know, leaning over him. The drug was wearing off a little, and Hyrst could see them more clearly, see the bitter disappointment in their eyes.

"Is that all?" Christina said. "Are you sure? Go back again—"

They took him back again, and it was the same.

"That's all MacDonald said? Then we're no closer to the Titanite than we were before."

Hyrst was not interested in the Titanite. "Vernon," he said. Something red and wild rose up in him, and he tried to tear away the straps that held him. "Vernon. I'll get him—"

"Later, Hyrst," said Shearing, and sighed. "Lie still a bit. He's on Bellaver's yacht, remember? Quite out of reach. Now think. MacDonald said, You won't get it, it's where nobody will ever get it—"

"What's the use?" said Christina, turning away. "It was a faint hope anyway. Dying men don't draw obliging maps for you." She sat down on the edge of a bunk and put her head in her hands. "We might as well give up. You know that."

One of the two Lazarites who had done the latent probe on Hyrst said with hollow hopefulness, "Perhaps if we let him rest a while and then go over it again—"

"Let me up out of here," said Hyrst, still groggy with the drug. "I want Vernon."

"I'll help you get him," said Shearing, "if you'll tell me what MacDonald meant when he said *nobody will ever get it unless I show them how.*"

"How the devil do I know?" Hyrst tugged at the straps, raging. "Let me up."

"But you knew MacDonald well. You worked with him and beside him for years."

"Does that tell me where he hid the Titanite? Don't be an ass, Shearing. Let me up."

"But," said Shearing equably, "he didn't say *where*. He said *how*."

"Isn't that the same thing?"

"Is it? Listen. Nobody will ever get it unless I show them where. Nobody will ever get it unless I show them how."

Hyrst stopped fighting the straps. He began to frown. Christina lifted her head again. She did not say anything. The two Lazarites who had done the probe stood still and held their breath.

Shearing's mind touched Hyrst's stroking it as with soothing fingers. "Let's think about that for a minute. Let your thoughts move freely: MacDonald was an engineer. The engineer. Of the four, he alone knew every inch of the physical set-up of the refinery. So?"

"Yes. That's right. But that doesn't say where — Wait a minute, though. If he'd just shoved it in a crack somewhere in the mountains, he'd know a detector might find it, more easily than before it was dug. He'd have put it some where deep, deeper than he could possibly dig. Maybe in an abandoned mine?"

"No place," said Shearing, "is

too deep for us to probe. We've examined every abandoned mine on that side of Titan. And it doesn't fit, anyway. No. Try again."

"He wouldn't have brought it back to the refinery. One of us would be sure to find it. Unless, of course—"

Hyrst stopped, and the tension in the sick-bay tightened another notch. The ship lurched sharply, swerved, and shot upward with a deafening thunder of rocket-blasts. Hyrst shut his eyes, thinking hard.

"Unless he put it in some place so dangerous that nobody ever went there. A place where even he didn't go, but which he would know about being the engineer."

"Can you think of any place that, would answer that description?"

"Yes," said Hyrst slowly. "The underground storage bins. They're always hot, even when they're empty. Anything hidden near them would be blanketed by radiation. No detector would see anything but uranium. Probably even you wouldn't."

"No," said Shearing, looking amazed. "Probably we wouldn't. The radioactive disturbance would be too strong to get through, even if we were looking for something beyond it, which we weren't."

CHRISTINA had sprung up. Now she bent over Hyrst and said, "But is there a way it could

have been done? Obviously, the Titanite couldn't have been put directly into the bin with the uranium — if nothing else, it would have been shipped out in the next tanker."

"Oh, yes," said Hyrst. "There would be several ways. I can think of a couple myself, and I've never even see the layout. The repair-lift shaft, I know, goes clear down to the feeder mechanism, and there's some kind of a system of dispersal tunnels and an emergency gadget that trips automatically to release a liquid-graphite damping material into them in case the radiation level gets too high. I don't remember that it ever did, but it's a safeguard. There'd be plenty of places to hide a lead box full of Titanite."

"*Unless I show them how,*" repeated Shearing slowly, and began to undo the straps that held Hyrst to the table. "It has an ominous sound. I'll bet you that locating the Titanite will be child's play compared to getting it out. Well, we'll do what we can."

"The first thing," said Christina grimly, "is to get rid of Bellaver. If he has the slightest suspicion where we're headed he'll radio ahead and have all Titan alerted."

Hyrst, sitting up now on the edge of the table, hanging on against the lurching of the ship, said, "That's right— he owns the

refinery now, doesn't he? Is it still working?"

"No. The mines around there played out, oh, ten, fifteen years ago. The activity's shifted to the north and east on the other side of the range. That is what may possibly give us a chance." Shearing staggered with Hyrst across the bucking deck and sat tailor-fashion in the bunk, his eyes intent. "Hyrst, I want you to remember everything you can about the refinery. The ground plan, exactly where the buildings are, the hoists, the landing field. Everything."

Hyrst said, showing the edges of his teeth, "When do I get Vernon?"

"You'll get him. I promise you."

"What about Bellaver? He's still behind us."

Shearing smiled. "That's Christina's job. Let her worry."

Hyrst nodded. He began to remember the refinery. Christina and the other two went out.

A short while later a number of things happened, violently, and in quick succession. The ship of the Lazarites, pursuing its wild and headlong course through the swarming debris of the Belt, was far ahead of Bellaver's yacht but still within instrument range. Apparently in desperation it plunged suddenly on a tangential course into a cluster of great jagged rocks all travelling together at a furious rate of speed. The cluster was per-

haps two hundred miles across. The Lazarite ship twisted and turned, and then there was a swift bright flowering of flame, and then nothing.

"She's blown her tubes," said Bellaver exultantly, on the bridge of his yacht. The instruments had lost contact, chiefly because the cluster was so thick that it was impossible to separate one body from another.

Vernon said, "They're not blanking my mind any more. It stopped, like that."

But he was still doubtful.

"Can you locate the ship?" asked Bellaver.

"I'm trying."

Bellaver caught his arm. "Look there!"

There was a second, larger and more brilliant, flash of flame.

"They've hit an asteroid," he said. "They're done for."

"I can't locate them," Vernon said. "No ship, no wreckage. It could be a trick. They could be holding a cloak."

"A trick?" said Bellaver. "I doubt it. Anyway, we're running low on fuel, and I'm not going to go into that cluster and risk my own neck to find out. If by any chance they do come out again later on, we'll deal with them."

But they both watched the cluster until it had whirled on out of sight. And neither eye nor instru-

ment nor Vernon's probing mind could distinguish any sign of life.

## CHAPTER VIII

TITAN LAY below them in the Saturn-glow, under the fantastic glory of the Rings. A bitter, repellent world of jagged peaks and glimmering plains of poison snow. The tiny life-raft dropped toward it, skittering nervously as it hit the thin atmosphere. Hyrst clung hard to the handholds, trying not to retch. He was not habituated to space anyway, and the skiff had been bad enough. Now, without any hull around him and nothing but a curved shield in front of him, he felt like an ant on a flying leaf.

"I don't like it either," Shearing said. "But it gives us a fifty-fifty chance of getting through unnoticed. Radar usually isn't looking for anything so small."

"I understand all the reasons," Hyrst said. "It's my stomach that's obtuse."

He could make out the pattern of the refinery now, a million miles of vertigo below him. The Lazarite ship was somewhere up and out behind them, hiding in the Rings. The trick had worked with Bellaver out there in the Belt, and they hoped now that it would work with Bellaver's observers on Titan. There was no need for any fake explosions this time, to give the impression of

destruction. Secrecy was the watchword, all lights out and jet-blasts muffled to a spark. Later, when Hyrst and Shearing had accomplished their mission, the ship would drop down fast and take them off, with the Titanite, before any patrol craft would have time to arrive.

They hoped.

The buildings of the refinery were dark and cold, drifted out of shape by an accumulation of the thin, evil snow. The spiderweb of roads had faded from the plain, and the landing field was smooth and unmarked. Around its perimeter the six stiff towers of the hoists stood up like lonely sentinels, hooded and cloaked.

Hyrst felt a sudden tightening of his throat, and this was a thing he had not expected. A refinery on Titan was hardly a thing to be sentimental about. But it was bound up so intimately with other things, with hopes for a future that was now far behind him, with plans for Elena and the kids that were now a cruel mockery, with friendly memories of Saul and Landers, now long dead, that he could not look at it unmoved.

"Let's try again," said Shearing quietly. "If we could locate the Titanite definitely it might make all the difference. We'll hardly have time to search all six of the bins."

Glad of the distraction, Hyrst

tried. He linked his mind to Shearing's and they probed with this double probe, one after the other, the six hoists and the bins beneath them, while the raft fell whistling down the air.

It was the same as all the tries before. The bins had been empty for more than a decade, but the residual radiation was still hot enough to present a luminous haze to the eyes of the mind, fogging everything around it.

"Wait a minute," Hyrst said. "Let's use our wits. Look at the way those hoists are placed, in a wide crescent. Now if I was MacDonald, coming in from the mountains with a load of Titanite, and I wanted not to be seen, which one would I pick?"

"Either One or Six," said Shearing, without hesitation. "They're the farthest away from the buildings."

"But Number Six is at the west end of the crescent, and to reach it you would have to go clear across the landing field." He pointed mentally to Number One. "I'll bet on that one. Shall we give it another try?"

They did. This time, for a fleeting second, Hyrst thought he had something.

"So did I," said Shearing. "Sort of down under and behind."

"Yes," said Hyrst. "Look out!" His involuntary cry was caused by

the sudden collision of the life-raft with a cloud. The vapor was very thick, and after the cruel clarity of space it made Hyrst feel that he was smothering. Shearing jockeyed the raft's meagre controls, and in a minute or two they were below the cloud and spiralling down toward the landing field. It was snowing.

"Good," said Shearing. "We'll hope it keeps up."

THEY LANDED close to Number One Hoist and floundered rapidly through the shallow drifts, carrying some things. The hatch had been sealed with a plastic spray to prevent corrosion, and it took them several minutes to get it open. Inside the tower it was pitch black, but they did not need lights. Their other senses showed them the worn metal treads of the steps quite clearly. In the upper chamber the indicator panels were dark and dead. Hyrst shivered inside his suit. He had been here so many times before, so long ago.

"Let's get busy," Shearing said.

They pulled on the rayproofs they had brought with them from the raft. Without power the lift was useless, but the skeleton cage, stripped of all its tools, was not too heavy for two strong men to swing clear of the shaft top. They made sure it would stay clear, and then sent down a light collapsible ladder. Hyrst slid down first into the

smooth, round, totally unlighted hole, that had one segment of it open paralleling the machinery of the hoist.

"Take it carefully," Shearing said, and slid after him.

Clumsy in vac-suit and rayproof, Hyrst descended the ladder with agonizing slowness. Every impulse cried out for haste, but he knew if he hurried he would wind up at the bottom of the shaft as dead as MacDonald. The banging and knocking of their passage against the metal wall made a somber, hollow booming in that enclosed space, and it seemed to Hyrst that the silent belts and cables of the hoist hummed a little in sympathy. It was probably only the blood humming in his own ears.

"See anything yet?"

"No."

The vast strange glowing of the bin grew brighter as they approached it. The hoist was still "hot," and it glowed too, but nothing like the concentration in the bin.

"Even with rayproofs, we can't stay close to that too long."

"I don't think we'll have to. MacDonald was only human, and the bin was full then. He couldn't have stayed long either."

"See anything yet?"

"Nothing but fog. When you hit bottom, better use your light."

At long last Hyrst felt the bottom of the shaft under his

boots. He stood aside from the ladder and switched on his belt lamp. In this case the physical eyes were better than the mental, being insensitive to radiation. Instantly the gears and cams of the feeder assembly sprang into sharp relief on the open side of the shaft. Shearing stumbled down off the ladder and switched on his own light.

"Where was it we thought we saw something?"

"Down under and behind." Hyrst turned slowly around, questioning. The shaft was unbroken except by the repair opening. He climbed through it, with some difficulty, because nobody was supposed to climb through it and the machinery was placed for easy access with extension tools from the lift. The bin itself was now directly opposite them, a big hopper cut deep in the solid rock and serving the feeder by simple gravity. The feeder pretty well filled its own rocky chamber. A place might have been found beside it for something not too big, but the first man who came down on the lift would have seen it whether he was looking for it or not.

Shearing pointed. A dark opening pierced the rock at one side. Hyrst tried to see into it with his mental eyes, but the "fog" was so dense and bright—

He saw it, an unsubstantial ghostly shadow, but there. A square

box some twenty feet down the tunnel.

Shearing drew a quick sharp breath "Let's go."

They went into the tunnel, crouching, scraping against the narrow sides.

"Look out for booby traps."

"I don't see any—yet."

The box sat in the middle of the tunnel. There was no way to get around it, no way to see over it without lying on its top and wriggling between it and the low roof. Hyrst and Shearing shut their eyes.

"I'm not sure, but I think I see a wire. Damn the fog. Can't tell where it goes —"

**H**YRST took cutters from his belt and slithered cautiously over the box. His heart was hammering very hard and his hand shook so that he had great difficulty getting the cutters and the wire together. The wire was attached to the back of the box, very crudely and hastily attached with a blob of plastic solder. It was not until he had pinched the wire with the sharp metal cutter-teeth that he realized the plastic was non-metallic and the wire bare. And then, of course, it was too late.

There must have been a simple energizer somewhere up ahead, still charging itself from the ample ra-



diation source. The cutters flew out of Hyrst's hand in a shower of sparks, and in the darkness of the tunnel ahead there was a sudden wild flare of light, and an explosion of dust. A shock wave, not too great, hammered past Hyrst's helmet. Shearing yelled once, a protest broken short in mid-cry. Then they waited.

The dust settled. The brief tremor of the rock was stilled.

In the roof of the tunnel, where the blast had been, a broken dump-trap hung open, but nothing poured out of it but a handful of black dust.

Hyrst began to laugh. He lay on his belly on top of the box of Titanite and laughed. The tears ran out of his eyes and down his nose and dropped onto the inside of his helmet. Shearing hit him from behind. He hit him until he stopped laughing, and then Hyrst shook his head and said.

"Poor MacDonald."

"Yeah. Go ahead, you can cut the wire now."

"Such a lovely booby trap. But he wasn't figuring on time. They went away from here, Shearing, you see? And when they went they drained off the liquid graphite and took it with them. So there isn't anything left to flood the tunnel. Pathetic, isn't it?"

Shearing hit him again. "Cut the wire."

He cut it. They scuffled backward down the tunnel, dragging the box. When they got back into the shaft where there was room to do it they opened up the box.

"Doesn't look like much, does it, for all the trouble it's made?"

"No, it doesn't. But then gold doesn't look like much, or uranium, or a handful of little dry seeds." Shearing picked up a chunk of the rough, grayish ore. "You know what that is, Hyrst? That's the stars."

It was Hyrst's turn to prod Shearing into quiet. The starship and the dream that went with it were still only an intellectual interest to him. They shared out the Titanite into two webbing sacks. It made a light load for each, hardly noticeable when clipped to a belt-ring at the back.

Hyrst felt suddenly very nervous. Perhaps it was reaction, perhaps it was the memory of having been trapped in a similar hole on the Valhalla asteroid. Perhaps it was a mental premonition, obscured by the radioactive "fog". At any rate, he started to climb the ladder with almost suicidal haste, urging Shearing on after him. The shaft seemed to be a mile high. It seemed to lengthen ahead of him as he climbed, so that he was never any nearer the top. He knew it was only imagination, because he passed the level markers, but it was

the closest thing to a nightmare he had ever experienced when he was broad awake. Just after they had passed the E Level mark, Shearing spoke.

"A ship has landed."

Hyrst looked mentally. The fog-effect was not so great now, and he could see quite clearly. It was a small ship, and two men were getting out of it. It had stopped snowing.

"Radar must have picked up the raft after 'all," said Shearing. "Or else somebody spotted the jet-flares." He began to climb faster. "We better get out of this before they come in."

D- Level. Hyrst's hands were cold and stiff inside his gauntlets, clumsy hooks to catch the slender rungs. The two men were standing outside in the snow, peering around.

C Level. One of the two men saw the raft parked by the hoist tower. He pointed, and they moved toward it.

B Level. Hyrst's boots slipped and scrambled, banging the shaft wall. "Christ," said Shearing. "You sound like a temple gong. What are you trying to do, alarm the whole moon?"

THE MEN outside bent over the raft. They looked at it. Then they looked at the hoist tower. They left the raft and began to run, pulling guns out of their

belts.

A Level. Hyrst's breath roared in his helmet like a great wind. He thought of the long dark way down that was below them, and how MacDonald had looked at the bottom of the shaft, and how he would take Shearing with him if he fell, and nobody would get to the stars, and Vernon would go free. He set his teeth, and sobbed, and climbed. Outside, the two men cautiously removed the hatch and stepped into the tower.

End of the ladder. A level floor to sprawl on. Hyrst squirmed away from the shaft. He thought for a minute he was going to pass out, and he fumbled with the oxygen valve, making the mixture richer. His head began to clear. Shearing was now beside him. This time they had guns, too. Shearing gave him a quick mental caution, *Not unless you have to*. One of the two men was placing a tentative foot on the stair that led up to where they were. The other man was close behind him. Shearing took careful aim and fired, at half power.

The harsh blue bolt did not strike either man. But they went reeling back in a cloud of burning flakes, and when Shearing shouted to them to drop their weapons and get out they did so, half stunned from the shock. Hyrst and Shearing leaped down the stairs, stopping only long enough to pick up

the guns. Then they scrambled outside. The two men were running as hard as they could for their ship, but they had not gone far and Shearing stopped them with another shot that sent a geyser of methane steam puffing up practically under their feet.

"Not yet," he said. "Later."

The two men stood, sullenly obedient. They were both young, and not bad looking. Just doing a job, Hyrst thought. No real harm in them, just doing a job, like so many people who never stop to worry about what the job means. They both wore Bellaver's insignia on their vac-suits.

One of them said, as though he were reciting a lesson in which he had no real personal interest, "You're trespassing on private property. You'll be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

"Sure," said Shearing. He motioned to the hoist tower. "Back inside."

The young men hesitated. "What you going to do?"

"Nothing fatal. It shouldn't take you more than half an hour to break out again."

He marched them to the hatch and saw them inside it. Hyrst was watching the sky, the black star-glittering sky with the glorious arch of the Rings across it and one milky-bright curve of Saturn visible and growing above the eastern

horizon.

"They're coming," he said mentally to Shearing.

"Good." He started to close the hatch, and one of the young men pointed suddenly to the sack clipped to Shearing's belt.

"You've been stealing something."

"Tell that to Bellaver."

"You bet I will. The fullest extent of the law, mister! The fullest extent—"

The hatch closed. Shearing jammed the fastening mechanism so it could not be turned from the inside. Then he went and stood beside Hyrst in the glimmering plain, watching the ship drop down out of the Rings.

Hyrst said, "They'll tell Bellaver."

"Naturally."

"What will Bellaver do?"

"I'm not sure. Something drastic. He wants our starship so hard he'd murder his own children to get it. You can see why. In itself it's priceless, a hundred years ahead of its time, but that's not all. It's what it stands for. To us it means freedom and safety. To Bellaver it means—"

He gestured toward the sky, and Hyrst nodded, seeing in Shearing's mind the image of a gigantic Bellaver, ten times bigger than God, gathering the whole galaxy into his arms.

"I wish you luck," said Hyrst. He unhooked the sack of Titanite from his belt and gave it to Shearing. "It'll take a little while to refine the stuff and build the relays, even so. That may be time enough. Come back for me if you can."

"Vernon?"

"Yes."

Shearing nodded. "I said I'd help you get him. I will."

"No. This is my job. I'll do it alone. You belong there, with them. With Christina."

"Hyrst. Listen—"

"Don't tell me where the starship is. I might not hold out as well as you."

"All right, but Hyrst—in case we can't get back — look for us away from the Sun. Not toward it."

"I'll remember."

The ship landed. Shearing entered it, carrying the Titanite. And Hyrst walked away, toward the closed and buried buildings of the refinery.

It had begun to snow again.

## CHAPTER IX

IT WAS cold and dark and infinitely sad. Hyrst wandered through the rooms, feeling like a ghost, thinking like one. Everything had been removed from the buildings. The living quarters were now mere cubicular tombs for a

lot of memories, absolutely bare of any human or familiar touch. It felt very strange to Hyrst. He kept telling himself that fifty years had passed, but he could not believe it. It seemed only a few months since MacDonald's death, months occupied by investigation and trial and the raging, futile anguish of the unjustly accused. The long interval of the pseudo-death was no more than a night's sleep, to a mind unconscious of passing time. Now it seemed that Saul and Landers should still be here, and there should be lights and warmth and movement.

There was nothing. He could not bring himself to stay in the living quarters. He went into one of the storerooms and sat on a concrete buttress and waited. It was a long and dreadful wait. During it all the emotional storms occasioned by the murder and its aftermath passed through his mind. Scenes with Saul and Landers. Scenes with the investigators, with MacDonald's family, with lawyers and reporters. Scenes with Elena. The whole terrible nightmare, leading inevitably to that culminating moment when the door of the airlock opened and he joined the sleepers on the plain. When it was all over Hyrst felt shaken and exhausted, but calm. The face of Vernon burned brightly in his mind's eye.

Without bothering to open the

steel-shuttered windows, he watched the two young men force their way out of the hoist tower. He watched them run to their ship and chatter excitedly over their radio. By the time, much later, that Bellaver's yacht came screaming down to the landing field on a flaming burst of jets, he could watch it with almost the cool detachment of a spectator. He was careful to keep his shields up tight against Vernon, and he did not think the other Lazarite would be likely to look for him. Vernon seemed to be fully occupied with Bellaver.

*"What else would they be stealing, you fool? You should have killed Hyrst before, when you had the chance."*

*"Somebody had to take the blame for MacDonald. Anyway, you had him aboard the Happy Dream. Why didn't you hang onto him?"*

*"Don't get insolent with me, Vernon. I can turn you over to the police anytime, for any one of a hundred things."*

*"Not without tipping your hand, Bellaver."*

*"It would be worth it."* A string of foul names, delivered in a furious scream. *"You couldn't locate the Titanite, but they did, just as soon as they got hold of Hyrst."*

*"All right, Mr. God Almighty Bellaver, turn me in. But if it was the Titanite they took, you*

*haven't a chance of finding that starship without me."*

*"You haven't done very well at it so far."*

*"In the excitement, they may get careless. But it's up to you."*

More foul language, but Bellaver did not repeat his threat. He and Vernon, with a couple of other men, got into vac-suits and lumbered across the snow to the hoist tower. From inside the cold dark buried building, Hyrst watched them, and thought hard and fast, and smiled. Presently he left the building and circled cautiously through the snowy gloom until he was in range of their helmet-communicators. He could hear them aurally now, but he kept watching them, esper-fashion.

THEY inspected the empty lead box, and the young men told what had happened, and Bellaver turned his raging fury against them. There was no longer any doubt that the Titanite had been found and taken away, and Bellaver saw the stars and worlds and moons, the bright glowing plunder of a galaxy, slipping away from him. He threatened the two young men with every punishment he could think of for not having stopped the thieves, and one of the young men turned white and anxious, and the other one flushed brick red and shook his fist close

to Bellaver's helmet.

"You go to hell," he said. "I don't care who you are. You go to hell."

He walked out of the hoist tower, with his companion stumbling at his heels, and Bellaver screamed after them, and behind him the crewmen looked shocked and contemptuous, and Vernon laughed openly, showing the edges of his teeth.

The two young men got into their ship and went away. Bellaver turned and stood looking at the empty box. He seemed exhausted now, hopeless, like a child about to break down and cry. Vernon went over and kicked the box.

"Hyrst had the advantage," he said. "He knew MacDonald and he knew the refinery. Even so, it must have been pure guesswork. Nobody could probe through that fog."

"What are we going to do?" asked Bellaver. "Vernon, what are we going to do?"

Hyrst spoke for the first time, his voice ringing loud and startling in their ears.

"Don't ask Vernon," he said. "Ask me."

There was a moment of complete silence. Hyrst felt Vernon's mind brush his, and he permitted himself one cruel flash of triumph. Then everybody spoke at once, Vernon explaining why he hadn't

spotted Hyrst—who could have figured he'd stay behind at a time like this?—the crew-members nervously fingering their guns, and Bellaver crying,

"Hyrst! Is that you, Hyrst? Where are you?"

"Where I can get the first shot at anybody coming out of the tower, and where nobody from the yacht will ever reach me. Tell them all to stay put. Go ahead, Bellaver, you want to hear me out, don't you?"

"What do you want to say?"

"I can find you that starship. Tell them, Bellaver."

He told them. And Vernon said to Bellaver, "If he's willing to betray his friends, why would he get them the Titanite?" He laughed. "It isn't even a good trick."

"Oh, yes, it is," said Hyrst softly. "It's a very good one. The best. You see, I don't care about the starship or the Titanite. All I care about is the man who killed MacDonald. They were sort of bound up together. Ever hear of latent impressions, Vernon? I was unconscious, but my ears heard and my eyes saw, and my brain remembered, when it was shown how."

"That was fifty years ago," said Vernon. "People don't understand about us. Nobody would believe you if you told them."

"They would if Bellaver told them. They would if Bellaver ex-

plained out loud about the Lazarites, about what happens to men when they go through the door. They'd listen to him. And there must be others who know, or at least suspect." Hyrst paused, long enough to smile. "The beauty of that is, Bellaver, that you're in the clear. You're not responsible for a murder your grandfather had done. You could swear you didn't even know about it until now."

Vernon said to Bellaver, "If you do this to me, I'll blast you wide open."

"What can he do, Bellaver?" Hyrst shouted. "He can talk, but you have the money, the position, the legal powers. You can talk louder. And when they know the truth, will anybody take the word of a Lazarite against a human man?"

His voice rose higher and louder, drowning out Vernon's cry.

"Are you afraid of him, Bellaver? Are you so afraid of him you'll let the starship go?"

"Hold him," Bellaver said, and the crewmen held Vernon fast.

"Wait a minute, Hyrst," he said.

"What's your angle? Is it just revenge? Are you selling out your friends for something over and done half a century ago? I don't believe it, Hyrst."

Hyrst said slowly, "I can answer that, so even you will understand. I have children. They're

getting old now. They've lived all their lives thinking their father killed a man, not for love or for justice or in self-defense, but for sheer cold-blooded greed. I want them to know it wasn't so."

"Hold him!" Bellaver said. The crewmen struggled with Vernon, and Vernon said viciously to Bellaver,

"He'll never lead you to the starship. I can read his mind. When you've turned me in and blackened your grandfather's name to clear him, he'll laugh in your face. What are you, Bellaver, a fool?"

"Am I, Hyrst?"

"That's for you to find out. I'm offering you the starship for Vernon, and that's fair enough, because I want him as bad as you want it. And I can tell you, Bellaver, if you decide to play it smart and call in your guards to hunt me down, it will do you no good. I won't be alive when they take me."

Silence. In his mind's eye Hyrst could see the beads of sweat running down Bellaver's face behind his helmet. He could see Vernon's face, too. It gave him pleasure.

"It should be an easy decision, Bellaver," he said. "After all, suppose I am lying. What have you got to lose but Vernon? And with his record, that isn't much."

"Hold him," said Bellaver. "All right, Hyrst. I'll do it. But I'll tell



you now. If you lie to me, there won't be any reawakening in another fifty years. This will be for good."

"Fair enough," said Hyrst. "I'm putting my gun away. I'm coming in."

He walked quickly through the snow toward the tower.

## CHAPTER X

ON THE BRIDGE of his yacht, Bellaver turned to Hyrst and said,

"I've done what you wanted. Now find me that starship."

Hyrst nodded. "Take off."

The rockets roared and thundered, and the swift yacht leaped quivering into the sky.

Hyrst sat quietly in his recoil chair. He felt a different man, changed entirely in the last few days. Much had happened in those days.

Bellaver had got busy on the radio even before his yacht left Titan, and the story of the Lazarites had burst like a nova upon the Solar System. Already there were instances of suspected Lazarites being mobbed by their neighbors, and Government was frantically concerning itself with all the new, far-reaching implications of the Humane Penalty.

Close on the heels of this bombshell had come Vernon's angry ac-

cusations against Bellaver, delivered as soon as he was given to the authorities on Mars. During the twenty Martian hours necessary for formal charge and the taking of depositions, and while Bellaver's yacht was being refueled, Vernon's story of the starship went out on all the interworld circuits. And it had been as Christina had said. The whole Solar System was frantic to have the Lazarites caught and stopped, and every man in space became a self-appointed searcher for the hidden starship. Bellaver, letting his lawyers worry about Vernon's accusations, had already laid formal claim to that ship, based on the value of the stolen Titanite.

"Where?" demanded Bellaver now, in a fury of impatience. "Where?"

"Wait," said Hyrst. "There are too many watching, ready to follow you. They know what you're after. Wait till we're clear of Mars."

He sat in his chair, looking into space. His drive was all gone, and the anger that had fed it. Somewhere his son and his two daughters were drawing their first free breaths relieved of a burden they should never have had to carry. They knew now that he was innocent, and they could think of him now without bitterness, speak his name without hate. He had done

what he had set out to do, and he was finished. He knew what was ahead of him, but he was too tired to care.

The yacht went fast, away from the old red weary planet. Hyrst thought of Shearing and Christina and the others, laboring over their ship on the dark plain. He felt safe in doing this, because Vernon was gone and the gray evil man who had helped to torture Shearing aboard the *Happy Dream* was still in an Earth hospital recovering from the blow Hyrst had given him. They were out of reach, and Hyrst was the only Lazarite Bellaver had.

He did not try to get through to Shearing because he knew that was impossible, and there was no reason for it anyway. He let his mind stretch out and rove through the nighted spaces beyond Saturn, beyond Uranus and Neptune, beyond the black and frigid bulk of Pluto. He did not see the ship nor touch a Lazarite mind, and so he knew that they were still holding the cloak, still hiding from possible betrayal. He withdrew his mind, and wished them luck.

"We're clear of Mars," said Bellaver. "Which way?"

"That way," said Hyrst, and pointed. "Toward the Sun."

The yacht swerved and steadied on a new course, toward the distant glare of Sol. And Bellaver

said,

"What's the exact location?"

"Can you trust every man in this crew?" asked Hyrst. "Can you be sure not one of them would give it away, when we stop to refuel? You're not the only one that knows about the starship now, remember."

"You could tell *me*."

"You're too impatient, Bellaver. You'd want to head straight there, and it won't be that easy. They have defenses. We have to be careful, or they'll destroy the ship before we reach it."

"Or finish their relays and go."

Bellaver gave Hyrst a long look. "I'll trust you because I have to. But I wasn't making an empty threat. And I'll do it so there won't be any thought of murder. You'd better find me that ship, Hyrst."

From then on, Bellaver hardly slept. He paced the corridors and haunted the control room and watched Hyrst with a gnawing, agonizing doubt. Hyrst began to feel for him a distant sort of pity, as he might have felt for a man afflicted by some disease brought on by his own excesses.

THE YACHT passed the orbit of Earth, refueled at an obscure space station, and sped on. Hyrst continued to stall Bellaver, ordering a change of course from time to time to keep him happy. At

intervals he let his mind rove through those dark spaces - they were leaving farther behind with every passing second. Each time it was a greater effort, but still there was no sign of the starship or its base, and so he knew that the labor still went on.

By the time the yacht reached the orbit of Venus a fan-shaped cordon of other ships had collected around and behind her drawn by the word that Bellaver was on his way to find the star-ship. Government patrols were in constant touch.

"They can't interfere," said Bellaver. "I've got a lien on that ship, a formal claim."

"Sure," said Hyrst. "But you'd better be the first to find it. Possession, you know. Bear off a bit. Mislead them. They're sure now they know where you're going."

"Don't they?" said Bellaver, looking ahead at the glittering spark that was Mercury. "There isn't anyplace else to go."

"Isn't there?"

Bellaver stared at him, narrowed. "The legend of the Vulcan was exploded by the first explorers. There is no intra-Mercurial world."

Hyrst shot a swift stabbing mental glance toward Pluto. Still nothing. He sighed and said easily,

"There wasn't then. There is now."

He brazened out the look of

incredulity on Bellaver's face.

"These are Lazarites, remember, not men. They built a place for themselves where nobody would ever think to look. Not a planet, of course, just a floating workshop. A satellite. And now you know. So you can let them beat you to Mercury."

"All right," said Bellaver softly. "All right."

They passed Mercury, lost in the blaze of the Sun, and only a few ships followed them, far behind. The rest stopped to search the craggy valleys of the Twilight Belt, and the bleak icefields of the Dark Side.

And now Hyrst had run his string out, and he knew it. When no intra-Mercurial satellite showed up, physically or on detector-screens, there was no further lie to tell. He drove his mind out and away, to the cold planets wheeling on the fringes of Sol's light, and he sweated, and prayed, and hoped that nothing had gone wrong. And suddenly the cloak was dropped, and he saw a lonesome chip of rock beyond Pluto, all hollowed out for shops and living quarters, and the great ship standing in the mile-long plain, with the stars all drifted overhead. And the ship lifted from the plain, circled upward, and suddenly was not.

Hyrst was bitterly sorry that he was not aboard. But he told Bell-

aver, "You can stop looking now. They've got away."

He watched Bellaver die, standing erect on his feet, still breathing but dying inside with the last outgoing of hope.

"I thought you were lying," he said, "but it was the only chance I had." He nodded, looking toward the shuttered port with the insufferable blaze outside. He said, in a flat, dead voice, "If you were put out here, bound, in a lifeboat, headed toward the Sun— Yes. I could make up a story to fit that."

In the same toneless voice, he called his men. And suddenly the yacht lurched over shuddering in the backwash of some tremendous energy. Hyrst and the others were flung scattering against the bulkheads, and the lights went out, and the instruments went dead.

Beyond the port, on the unshuttered side away from the Sun, a vast dark shape had materialized out of nothing, to hang close in space beside the yacht.

Hyrst heard in his mind, strong and clear, the voice of Shearing saying, "Didn't I tell you the brotherhood stands by its own? Besides, we couldn't make a liar out of you, now could we?"

Hyrst began to laugh, just a little bit hysterically. He told Bellaver, "There's your starship. And Shearing says if I'm not alive when he comes aboard to get me, that they won't be as careful about warping space when they go away as they were when they came."

Bellaver did not say anything. He sat on the deck where the shock had thrown him, not speaking. He was still sitting there when Hyrst passed through the airlock into the starship's boat, and he did not move even when the great ship vanished silently into whatever mysterious ultra-space the minds of the Lazarites had unlocked, outbound for the limitless freedom of the universe, where the wheeling galaxies thunder on forever across infinity and the stars burn bright, and there is nothing to stop the march of the Legion of Lazarus. And who knew, who could tell, where that march would end?

Aboard the starship, already a million miles away, Hyrst said to Christina, "When they brought me back from beyond the door, that was re-awakening. But this—this is being born again."

She did not answer that. But she took his hand and smiled.

**FEATURED NEXT ISSUE:—**

## **BATTLE FOR THE STARS**

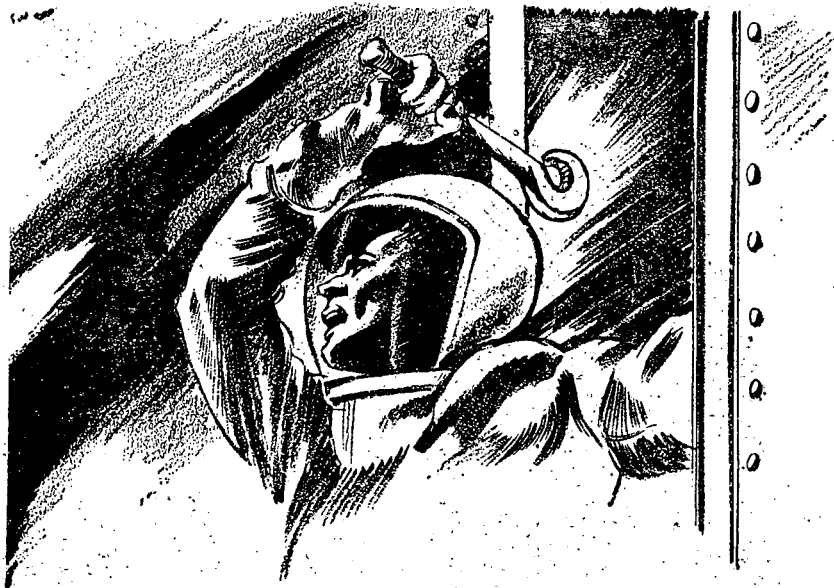
**BY ALEXANDER BLADE**

**A SMASHING NOVEL OF INTER-GALACTIC ADVENTURE.**

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Illustrated by H. W. McCauley





Nobody knew very much about the Sargasso area of the void; only one thing was certain: if a ship was caught there it was doomed in—

# The Graveyard Of Space

by

*Milton Lesser*

HE LIT a cigarette, the last one they had, and asked his wife "Want to share it?" "No. That's all right." Diane sat at the viewport of the battered old Gormann '87, a small figure of a woman hunched over and watching the parade of asteroids like tiny slow-moving incandescent flashes.

Ralph looked at her and said nothing. He remembered what it was like when she had worked by his side at the mine. It had not been much of a mine. It had been a bust, a first class sure as hell bust, like everything else in their life together. And it had aged her. Had it only been three years? he thought. Three years on asteroid 4712, a speck of cosmic dust drifting on its orbit in the asteroid belt between Jupiter and Mars. Uranium potential, high — the government had said. So they had leased the asteroid and prospected it and although they had not finished the job, they were finished. They were going home and now there were lines on Diane's face although she was hardly past twenty-four. And there was a bitterness, a bleakness, in her eyes.

The asteroid had ruined them, had taken something from them and given nothing in return. They were going home and, Ralph Meeker thought, they had left more than their second-hand mining equipment on asteroid 4712. They had left the happy early days of their marriage as a ghost, for whomever tried his luck next on 4712. They had never mentioned the word divorce; Diane had merely said she would spend some time with her sister in Marsport instead of going on to Earth . . .

"We'd be swinging around to

sunward on 4712," Ralph mused.

"Please. That's over. I don't want to talk about the mine."

"Won't it ever bother you that we never finished?"

"We finished," Diane said.

He smoked the cigarette halfway and offered it to her. She shook her head and he put the butt out delicately, to save it.

Then a radar bell clanged.

"What is it?" Ralph asked, immediately alert, studying the viewport. You had to be alert on an old tub like the Gormann '87. A hundred tonner, it had put in thirty years and a billion and some miles for several owners. Its warning devices and its reflexes — it was funny. Ralph thought, how you ascribed something human like reflexes to a hundred tons of battered metal — were unpredictable.

"I don't see anything," Diane said.

He didn't either. But you never knew in the asteroid belt. It was next to impossible to thread a passage without a radar screen — and completely impossible with a radar screen on the blink and giving you false information. You could shut it off and pray — but the odds would still be a hundred to one against you.

"There!" Diane cried. "On the left! The left, Ralph —"

He saw it too. At first it looked like a jumble of rocks, of dust as



the asteroid old-timers called the gravity-held rock swarms which pursued their erratic, dangerous orbits through the asteroid belt.

But it was not dust.

"Will you look at that," Diane said.

The jumble of rocks — which they were ready to classify as dust — swam up toward them. Ralph waited, expecting the automatic pilot to answer the radar warning and swing them safely around the obstacle. So Ralph watched and saw the dark jumble of rocks — silvery on one side where the distant sunlight hit it — apparently spread out as they approached it. Spread out and assume tiny shapes, shapes in miniature.

"Spaceships," Diane said. "Spaceships, Ralph. Hundreds of them."

They gleamed like silver motes in the sun or were black as the space around them. They tumbled slowly, in incredible slow motion, end over end and around and around each other, as if they had been suspended in a slowly boiling liquid instead of the dark emptiness of space.

"That's the sargasso," Ralph said.

"But —"

"But we're off course. I know it. The radar was probably able to miss things in our way, but failed to compensate afterwards and bring

us back to course. Now —"

Suddenly Ralph dived for the controls. The throbbing rockets of the Gormann '87 had not responded to the radar warning. They were rocketing on toward the sargasso, rapidly, dangerously.

"Hold on to something!" Ralph hollered, and punched full power in the left rockets and breaking power in the right forward rockets simultaneously, attempting to stand the Gormann '87 on its head and fight off the deadly gravitational attraction of the sargasso.

The Gormann '87 shuddered like something alive and Ralph felt himself thrust to the left and forward violently. His head struck the radar screen and, as if mocking him the radar bell clanged its warning. He thought he heard Diane scream. Then he was trying to stand, but the gravity of sudden acceleration gripped him with a giant hand and he slumped back slowly, aware of a wetness seeping from his nose, his ears —

All of space opened and swallowed him and he went down, trying to reach for Diane's hand. But she withdrew it and then the blackness, like some obscene mouth as large as the distance from here to Alpha Centauri, swallowed him.

"ARE YOU all right, Diane?" he asked.

He was on his knees. His head

ached and one of his legs felt painfully stiff, but he had crawled over to where Diane was down, flat on her back, behind the pilot chair. He found the water tank unsprung and brought her some and in a few moments she blinked her eyes and looked at him.

"Cold," she said.

He had not noticed it, but he was still numb and only half conscious, half of his faculties working. It *was* cold. He felt that now. And he was giddy and growing rapidly more so — as if they did not have sufficient oxygen to breathe.

Then he heard it. A slow steady hissing probably the sound feared most by spacemen. Air escaping.

Diane looked at him. "For God's sake, Ralph," she cried. "Find it."

He found it and patched it — and was numb with the cold and barely conscious when he had finished. Diane came to him and squeezed his hand and that was the first time they had touched since they had left the asteroid. Then they rested for a few moments and drank some of the achingly cold water from the tank and got up and went to the viewport. They had known it, but confirmation was necessary. They looked outside.

They were within the sargasso.

The battered derelict ships rol-

led and tumbled and spun out there, slowly, unhurried, in a mutual gravitational field which their own Gormann '87 had disturbed. It was a sargasso like the legendary Sargasso Seas of Earth's early sailing days, becalmed seas, seas without wind, with choking Sargasso weed, seas that snared and entrapped . . . .

"Can we get out?" Diane asked.

He shrugged. "That depends. How strong the pull of gravity is. Whether the Gormann's rocket drive is still working. If we can repair the radar. We'd never get out without the radar."

"I'll get something to eat," she said practically. "You see about the radar."

Diane went aft while he remained there in the tiny control cabin. By the time she brought the heated cans back with her, he knew it was hopeless. Diane was not the sort of woman you had to humor about a thing like that. She offered him a can of pork and beans and looked at his face, and when he nodded she said:

"It's no use?"

"We couldn't fix it. The scopes just wore out, Diane. Hell, if they haven't been replaced since this tub rolled off the assembly line, they're thirty years old. She's an '87."

"Is there anything we can do?"

He shrugged. "We're going to try. We'll check the air and water and see what we have. Then we start looking."

"Start looking? I don't understand."

"For a series eighty Gormann cruiser."

Diane's eyes widened. "You mean — out there?"

"I mean out there. If we find a series eighty cruiser — and we might — and if I'm able to transfer the radarscopes after we find out they're in good shape, then we have a chance."

Diane nodded slowly "If there are any other minor repairs to make, I could be making them while you look for a series eighty Gormann."

But Ralph shook his head. "We'll probably have only a few hours of air to spare, Diane. If we both look, we'll cover more ground. I hate to ask you, because it won't be pretty out there. But it might be our only chance."

"I'll go, of course. Ralph?"

"Yes?"

"What is this sargasso, anyway?"

**H**E SHRUGGED as he read the meters on the compressed air tanks. Four tanks full, with ten hours of air, for two, in each. One tank half full. Five hours. Five plus forty. Forty-five hours of air.

They would need a minimum of thirty-five hours to reach Mars.

"No one knows for sure about the sargasso," he said, wanting to talk, wanting to dispel his own fear so he would not communicate it to her as he took the space-suits down from their rack and began to climb into one. "They don't think it's anything but the ships, though. It started with a few ships. Then more. And more. Trapped by mutual gravity. It got bigger and bigger and I think there are almost a thousand derelicts here now. There's talk of blasting them clear, of salvaging them for metals and so on. But so far the planetary governments haven't co-operated."

"But how did the first ships get here?"

"It doesn't make a hell of a lot of difference. One theory is ships only, and maybe a couple of hunks of meteoric debris in the beginning. Another theory says there may be a particularly heavy small asteroid in this maze of wrecks somewhere — you know, superheavy stuff with the atoms stripped of their electrons and the nuclei squeezed together, weighing in the neighborhood of a couple of tons per square inch. That could account for the beginning, but once the thing got started, the wrecked ships account for more wrecked ships and pretty soon you have — a sar-

gasso."

Diane nodded and said, "You can put my helmet on now."

"All right. Don't forget to check the radio with me before we go out. If the radio doesn't work, then you stay here. Because I want us in constant radio contact if we're both out there. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir, captain," she said, and grinned. It was her old grin. He had not seen her grin like that for a long time. He had almost forgotten what that grin was like. It made her face seem younger and prettier, as he had remembered it from what seemed so long ago but was only three years. It was a wonderful grin and he watched it in the split-second which remained before he swung the heavy helmet up and in place over her shoulders.

Then he put on his own helmet awkwardly and fingered the outside radio controls. "Hear me?" he said.

"I can hear you." Her voice was metallic but very clear through the suit radios.

"Then listen. There shouldn't be any danger of getting lost. I'll leave a light on inside the ship and we'll see it through the ports. It will be the only light, so whatever you do, don't go out of range. As long as you can always see it, you'll be O. K. Understand?"

"Right," she said as they both climbed into the Gormann '87's airlock and waited for the pressure to leave it and the outer door to swing out into space. "Ralph? I'm a little scared, Ralph."

"That's all right," he said. "So am I."

"What did you mean, it won't be pretty out there?"

"Because we'll have to look not just for series eighty Gormanns but for any ships that look as old as ours. There ought to be plenty of them and any one of them could have had a Gormann radarscope, although it's unlikely. Have to look, though."

"But what — won't be pretty?"

"We'll have to enter those ships. You won't like what's inside."

"Say, how will we get in? We don't have blasters or weapons of any kind."

"Your suit rockets," Ralph said. "You swing around and blast with your suit rockets. A porthole should be better than an airlock if its big enough to climb through. You won't have any trouble."

"But you still haven't told me what —"

"Inside the ships. People. They'll all be dead. If they didn't lose their air so far, they'll lose it when we go in. Either way, of course, they'll be dead. They've all been dead for years, with no food. But without air —"

"What are you stopping for?" Diane said. "Please go on."

"A body, without air. Fifteen pounds of pressure per square inch on the inside, and zero on the outside. It isn't pretty. It bloats."

"My God, Ralph."

"I'm sorry, kid. Maybe you want to stay back here and I'll look."

"You said we only have ten hours. I want to help you."

All at once, the airlock swung out. Space yawned at them, black enormous, the silent ships, the dead sargasso ships, floating slowly by, eternally, unhurried. . . .

"Better make it eight hours," Ralph said over the suit radio. "We'd better keep a couple of hours leeway in case I figured wrong. Eight hours and remember, don't get out of sight of the ship's lights and don't break radio contact under any circumstances. These suit radios work like miniature radar sets, too. If anything goes wrong, we'll be able to track each other. It's directional beam radio."

"But what can go wrong?"

"I don't know," Ralph admitted. "Nothing probably." He turned on his suit rockets and felt the sudden surge of power drive him clear of the ship. He watched Diane rocketing away from him to the right. He waved his hand in the bulky spacesuit. "Good luck," he called. "I love you, Diane."

"Ralph," she said. Her voice caught. He heard it catch over the suit radio. "Ralph, we agreed never to — oh, forget it. Good luck, Ralph. Good luck, oh good luck. And I —"

"You what."

"Nothing, Ralph, Good luck."

"Good luck," he said, and headed for the first jumble of space wrecks.

IT WOULD probably have taken them a month to explore all the derelicts which were old enough to have Gormann series eighty radarscopes. Theoretically, Ralph realized, even a newer ship could have one. But it wasn't likely, because if someone could afford a newer ship then he could afford a better radarscope. But that, he told himself, was only half the story. The other half was this: with a better radarscope a ship might not have floundered into the sargasso at all . . . .

So it was hardly possible to pass up any ship if their life depended on it — and the going was slow. Too slow.

He had entered some dozen ships in the first four hours turning, using his shoulder rockets to blast a port hole out and climb in through there. He had not liked what he saw, but there was no preventing it. Without a light it wasn't so bad, but you needed a light to examine the radar scope . . . .

They were dead. They had been dead for years but of course there would be no decomposition in the airless void of space and very little even if air had remained until he blasted his way in, for the air was sterile canned spaceship air. They were dead, and they were bloated. All impossibly fat men, with white faces like melons and gross bodies like Tweedle Dee's and limbs like fat sausages.

By the fifth ship he was sick to his stomach, but by the tenth he had achieved the necessary detachment to continue his task. Once — it was the eighth ship — he found a Gormann series eighty radar-scope, and his heart pounded when he saw it. But the scope was hopelessly damaged, as bad as their own. Aside from that one, he did not encounter any, damaged or in good shape, which they might convert to their own use.

Four hours, he thought. Four hours and twelve ships. Diane reported every few moments by intercom. In her first four hours she had visited eight ships. Her voice sounded funny. She was fighting it every step of the way, he thought. It must have been hell to her, breaking into those wrecks with their dead men with faces like white, bloated melons —

In the thirteenth ship he found a skeleton.

He did not report it to Diane

over the intercom. The skeleton made no sense at all. The flesh could not possibly have decomposed. Curious, he clomped closer on his magnetic boots. Even if the flesh had decomposed, the clothing would have remained. But it was a skeleton picked completely clean, with no clothing, not even boots —

As if the man had stripped of his clothing first.

He found out why a moment later, and it left him feeling more than a little sick. There were other corpses aboard the ship, a battered Thompson '81 in worse shape than their own Gormann. Bodies, not skeletons. But when they had entered the sargasso they had apparently struck another ship. One whole side of the Thompson was smashed in and Ralph could see the repair patches on the wall. Near them and thoroughly destroyed, were the Thompson's space-suits.

The galley lockers were empty when Ralph found them. All the food gone — how many years ago? And one of the crew, dying before the others.

Cannibalism.

Shuddering, Ralph rocketed outside into the clear darkness of space. That was a paradox, he thought. It was clear, all right, but it was dark. You could see a great way. You could see a million million miles but it was darker

than anything on Earth. It was almost an extra-dimensional effect. It made the third dimension on earth, the dimension of depth, seem hopelessly flat.

"Ralph!"

"Go ahead, kid," he said. It was their first radio contact in almost half an hour.

"Oh, Ralph. It's a Gormann. An eighty-five; I think. Right in front of me. Ralph, if its scopes are good — oh, Ralph."

"I'm coming," he said. "Go ahead inside. I'll pick up your beam and be along." He could feel his heart thumping wildly. Five hours now. They did not have much time. This ship — this Gormann eighty-five which Diane had found — might be their last chance. Because it would certainly take him all of three hours to transfer the radarscope, using the rockets from one of their spacesuits, to their own ship.

He rocketed along now, following her directional beam, and listened as she said: "I'm cutting through the porthole now, Ralph. I —"

Her voice stopped suddenly. It did not drift off gradually. It merely ceased, without warning, without reason. "Diane!" he called. "Diane, can you hear me?"

by, tumbling slowly in their web of mutual gravitation. Some were molten silver if the wan sunlight caught them. Some were black, but every rivet, every seam was distinct. The impossible clarity of blackest space . . . .

"Ralph?" Her voice came suddenly.

"Yes, Diane. Yes. What is it?"

"What a curious thing. I stopped blasting at the port hole. I'm not going in that way. The airlock, Ralph."

"What about the airlock?"

"It opened up on me. It swung out into space, all of a sudden. I'm going in, Ralph."

Fear, unexpected, inexplicable, gripped him. "Don't," he said. "Wait for me."

"That's silly, Ralph. We barely have time. I'm going in now, Ralph. There. I'm closing the outer door. I wonder if the pressure will build up for me. If it doesn't, I'll blast the outer door with my rockets and get out of here . . . Ralph! The light's blinking. The pressure's building. The inner door is beginning to open, Ralph. I'm going inside now."

He was still tracking the beam. He thought he was close now, a hundred miles perhaps. A hundred miles by suit rocket was merely a few seconds but somehow the fear was still with him. It was that skeleton, he thought. That skele-

**H**E TRACKED the beam in desperate silence. Wrecks flashed



ton had unnerved him.

"Ralph. It's here, Ralph. A radarscope just like ours. Oh, Ralph, it's in perfect shape."

"I'm coming," he said. A big old Bartson Cruiser tumbled by end over end, a thousand tonner, the largest ship he had seen in here so far. At some of the portholes as he flashed by he could see faces, dead faces staring into space forever.

Then Diane's voice suddenly: "Is that you, Ralph?"

"I'm still about fifty miles out," he said automatically, and then cold fear, real fear, gripped him. *Is that you, Ralph?*

"Ralph, is that — oh, Ralph. Ralph —" she screamed, and was silent.

"Diane! Diane, answer me."

Silence. She had seen someone — something. Alive? It hardly seemed possible. He tried to notch his rocket controls further toward full power, but they were straining already —

The dead ships flashed by, scores of them, hundreds, with dead men and dead dreams inside, waiting through eternity, in no hurry to give up their corpses and corpses of dreams.

He heard Diane again then, a single agonized scream. Then there was silence, absolute silence.

Time seemed frozen, frozen like the faces of the dead men inside

the ships, suspended, unmoving, not dropping into the well of the past. The ships crawled by now, crawled. And from a long way off he saw the Gormann eighty-five. He knew it was the right ship because the outer airlock door had swung open again. It hung there in space, the lock gaping —

But it was a long way off.

He hardly seemed to be approaching it at all. Every few seconds he called Diane's name, but there was no answer. No answer. Time crawled with the fear icy now, as cold as death, in the pit of his stomach, with the fear making his heart pound rapidly, with the fear making it impossible for him to think. Fear — for Diane. I love you, Di, he thought. I love you. I never stopped loving you. We were wrong. We were crazy wrong. It was like a sargasso, inside of us, an emptiness which needed filling — but we were wrong. Diane —

**H**E REACHED the Gormann and plunged inside the airlock, swinging the outer door shut behind him. He waited. Would the pressure build up again, as it had built up for Diane? He did not know. He could only wait —

A red light blinked over his head, on and off, on and off as pressure was built. Then it stopped.

Fifteen pounds of pressure in

the airlock, which meant that the inner door should open. He ran forward, rammed his shoulder against it, tumbled through. He entered a narrow companionway and clomped awkwardly toward the front of the ship, where the radarscope would be located.

He passed a skeleton in the companionway, like the one he had seen in another ship. For the same reason, he thought. He had time to think that. And then he saw them.

Diane. On the floor, her spacesuit off her now, a great bruise, blue-ugly bruise across her temple. Unconscious.

And the thing which hovered over her.

At first he did not know what it was, but he leaped at it. It turned, snarling. There was air in the ship and he wondered about that. He did not have time to wonder. The thing was like some monstrous, misshapen creature, a man — yes, but a man to give you nightmares. Bent and misshapen, gnarled, twisted like the roots of an ancient tree, with a wild growth of beard, white beard, heavy across the chest, with bent limbs powerfully muscled and a gaunt face, like a death's head. And the eyes — the eyes were wild, staring vacantly, almost glazed as in death. The eyes stared at him and through him and then he closed with this thing which had felled

Diane.

It had incredible strength. The strength of the insane. It drove Ralph back across the cabin and Ralph, encumbered by his spacesuit, could only fight awkwardly. It drove him back and it found something on the floor, the metal leg of what once had been a chair, and slammed it down across the faceplate of Ralph's spacesuit.

Ralph staggered, fell to his knees. He had absorbed the blow on the crown of his skull through the helmet of the suit, and it dazed him. The thing struck again, and Ralph felt himself falling . . .

Somehow, he climbed to his feet again. The thing was back over Diane's still form again, looking at her, its eyes staring and vacant. Spittle drooled from the lips —

Then Ralph was wrestling with it again. The thing was almost protean. It all but seemed to change its shape and writhe from Ralph's grasp as they struggled across the cabin, but this time there was no weapon for it to grab and use with stunning force.

Half-crazed himself now, Ralph got his fingers gauntleted in rubberized metal, about the sinewy throat under the tattered beard. His fingers closed there and the wild eyes went big and he held it that way a long time, then finally thrust it away from him.

The thing fell but sprang to its

feet. It looked at Ralph and the mouth opened and closed, but he heard no sound. The teeth were yellow and black, broken, like fangs.

Then the thing turned and ran. Ralph followed it as far as the airlock. The inner door was slammed between them. A light blinked over the door.

Ralph ran to a port hole and watched.

The thing which once had been a man floated out into space, turning, spinning slowly. The gnarled twisted body expanded outward, became fat and swollen, balloon-like. It came quite close to the porthole, thudding against the ship's hull, the face — dead now — like a melon.

Then, after he was sick for a moment there beside the airlock, he went back for Diane.

THEY WERE back aboard the Gormann '87 now, their own ship. Ralph had revived Diane and brought her back — along with the other Gormann's radarscope — to their battered tub. The bruise on her temple was badly discolored and she was still weak, but she would be all right.

"But what was it?" Diane asked. She had hardly seen her attacker.

"A man," Ralph said. "God knows how long that ship was in here. Years, maybe. Years, alone

in space, here in the sargasso, with dead men and dead ships for company. He used up all the food. His shipmates died. Maybe he killed them. He needed more food —"

"Oh, no. You don't mean —"

Ralph nodded. "He became a cannibal. Maybe he had a space-suit and raided some of the other ships too. It doesn't matter. He's dead now."

"He must have been insane like that for years, waiting here, never seeing another living thing . . ."

"Don't talk about it," Ralph said, then smiled. "Ship's ready to go, Diane."

"Yes," she said.

He looked at her. "Mars?"

She didn't say anything.

"I learned something in there," Ralph said. "We were like that poor insane creature in a way. We were too wrapped up in the asteroid and the mine. We forgot to live from day to day, to scrape up a few bucks every now and then maybe and take in a show on Ceres or have a weekend on Vesta. What the hell, Di, everybody needs it."

"Yes," she said.

"Di?"

"Yes, Ralph?"

"I — I want to give it another try, if you do."

"The mine?"

"The mine eventually. The mine isn't important. Us, I mean." He paused, his hands still over the

controls. "Will it be Mars?"

"No," she said, and sat up and kissed him. "A weekend on Vesta sounds very nice. Very, very nice, darling."

Ralph smiled and punched the controls. Minutes later they had left the sargasso -- both sargassos -- behind them.

THE END

## ★ Fly By The Bottoms! ★

THE question of weightlessness, of "free fall", of gravitationlessness, in a hypothetical rocket of the future, has often been treated most casually in science-fiction stories. "Free fall" is generally regarded as an amusing condition, in which the rocketeers can cavort in their strange domain, as easy as fish in a bowl.

Alas, from what medical men can tell so far, this is far from the case, and while weightlessness will not prevent men from going into rocket "free-fall" in their eventual journey to the stars, the state of zero gravity is going to require a long and slow process of re-orientation, probably strongly assisted by a blend of medical and physical techniques.

To cope with free fall, the human body employs a "panic" reaction. When the human body—ordinarily always under gravitational influence—goes into a fall, the central nervous system reacts violently. You have only to recall a falling experience. Perhaps you also have experienced that atavistic carry-over from Man's days in the trees—remember the violent wrench of falling only to awaken in bed?

It is not inconceivable that free fall might be a perpetual state like that!

In an experiment to determine how important gravitation is to the sense of human orientation, Dr. Hubertus Strughold of the School of Space Medicine, performed an interesting experiment during the Second World War while he was a medical technician with the Luftwaffe.

Observing that pilots assert often that they fly "by the seat of their pants"—literally true, since buttock muscles serve as sensors of the gravitational field when one is sitting—he anaesthetized his posterior with novocaine and then took a flight with another pilot. To his expected alarm and astonishment, he was utterly unable to locate or orient himself!

It is strongly suggested, by even the most enthusiastic advocates of space flight, that provision for gravity be made if any long time in weightlessness is contemplated. If centrifugal force is necessary, we can expect the rotating spaceship. Adaptable as the human body is, there are limitations. You've got to fly by the seat of your pants!

Being one of the richest men in the world it was only natural that many people anticipated the day he would die. For someone should claim —

# Mr. Chipfellow's Jackpot

by

Dick Purcell

“I’m getting old,” Sam Chipfellow said, “and old men die.”

His words were an indirect answer to a question from Carter Hagen, his attorney. The two men were standing in an open glade, some distance from Sam Chipfellow’s mansion at Chipfellow’s Folly, this being the name Sam himself had attached to his huge estate.

Sam lived there quite alone except for visits from relatives and those who claimed to be relatives. He needed no servants nor help of any kind because the mansion was completely automatic. Sam did not live alone from choice, but he was highly perceptive and it made him uncomfortable to have relatives around with but one thought in their minds: *When are you going to die and leave me some money?*

Of course, the relatives could

hardly be blamed for entertaining this thought. It came as naturally as breathing because Sam Chipfellow was one of those rare individuals—a scientist who had made money; all kinds of money; more money than almost anybody. And after all, his relatives were no different than those of any other rich man. They felt they had rights.

Sam was known as The Genius of the Space Age, an apt title because there might not have been any space without him. He had been extremely versatile during his long career, having been responsible for the so-called eternal metals—metal against which no temperature, corrosive, or combinations of corrosives would prevail. He was also the pioneer of telepower, the science of control over things mechanical through the electronic emanations of thought waves. Because of his



investigations into this power, men were able to direct great ships by merely "thinking" them on their proper courses.

These were only two of his contributions to progress, there being many others. And now, Sam was facing the mystery neither he nor any other scientist had ever been able to solve.

#### Mortality.

There was a great deal of activity near the point at which the men stood. Drills and rock cutters had formed three sides of an enclosure in a ridge of solid rock, and now a giant crane was lowering thick slabs of metal to form the walls. Nearby, waiting to be placed, lay the slab which would obviously become the

door to whatever Sam was building. It's surface was entirely smooth, but it bore great hinges and some sort of a locking device was built in along one edge.

Carter Hagen watched the activity and considered Sam's reply to his question. "Then this is to be a mausoleum?"

Sam chuckled. "Only in a sense. Not a place to house my dead bones if that's what you mean."

Carter Hagen, understanding this lonely old man as he did, knew further questions would be useless. Sam was like that. If he wanted you to know something, he told you.

So Carter held his peace and they returned to the mansion where Sam gave him a drink after they concluded the business he had come on.

Sam also gave Carter something else—an envelope. "Put that in your safe. Carter. You're comparatively young. I'm taking it for granted you will survive me."

"And this is—?"

"My will. All old men should leave wills and I'm no exception to the rule. When I'm dead, open it and read what's inside."

CARTER Hagen regarded the envelope with speculation. Sam smiled. "If you're wondering how much I left you, Carter, I'll say this. You might get it all."

Hagen strove to appear nonchal-

ant but his eyes widened regardless. Sam enjoyed this. He said, "Yes, you'll have as much chance as anyone else."

"You mean as much chance as any of your relatives?"

"I mean what I said — as much as anyone. I've given them no more consideration than anyone else."

Carter Hagen stared, puzzled. "I'm afraid I don't understand you."

"I didn't expect you to, but that will come later. I'll tell you this much, though. No one will be barred. The winner will take all, and the winner may be anyone on this planet. My one regret is that I won't be around to see who gets the jackpot."

Carter Hagen dutifully pocketed the will and left. He returned on other business a week later. Sam Chipfellow's first question was, "well, what did you think of it?"

"Think of what?"

"My will."

Carter Hagen straightened to an indignant five-foot-six. "Mr. Chipfellow, I don't like having my integrity questioned. Your will was in a sealed envelope. You instructed me to read it after your death. If you think I'm the sort of man who would violate a trust—"

Sam put a drink into his attorney's hand. "Here, take this. Calm down."

Carter Hagen gulped the drink and allowed his feathers to smooth down. As he set down his glass, Sam leaned back and said, "Now that that's over, let's get on with it. Tell me—what did you think of my will?"

The attorney flushed. It was no use trying to fool Chipfellow. He was a master at that damned thought business. "I—I did look at it. I couldn't resist the temptation. The envelope was so easily opened."

Sam was regarding him keenly but without anger. "I know you're a crook Hagen but no more so than most people. So don't sit there cringing."

"This will is—well, amazing, and getting an advance look didn't hold me a bit unless—" Hagen looked up hopefully. "—unless you're willing to give me a slight clue—"

"I'll give you nothing. You take your chances along with the rest."

Hagen sighed. "As to the will itself, all I can say is that it's bound to cause a sensation."

"I think so, too," Sam said, his eyes turning a trifle sad. "It's too bad a man has to die just at the most interesting point of his life."

"You'll live for years, Mr. Chipfellow. You're in fine condition."

"Cut it out. You're itching for me to shuffle off so you can get a crack at what I'm leaving behind."

"Why, Mr. —"

"Shut up and have another drink."

CARTER Hagen did not have long to wait as life-times go. Eighteen months later, Sam Chipfellow dropped dead while walking in his garden. The news was broadcast immediately but the stir it caused was nothing to the world-wide reaction that came a few days later.

This was after all the relatives, all those who thought they had a faint chance of proving themselves relatives, and representatives of the press, radio, and video, gathered in the late Sam Chipfellow's mansion to hear the reading of the will. Carter Hagen, seeking to control his excitement, stood before a microphone installed for the benefit of those who couldn't get in.

He said "This is the last will and testament of Samuel Chipfellow, deceased. As his lawyer, it becomes my duty to—"

An angry murmur went up from those assembled. Exclamations of impatience. "Come on! Get on with it. Quit making a speech and read the will, we can't wait all day!"

"Quiet please, and give me your closest attention. I will read slowly so all may hear. This is Mr. Chipfellow's last testament:

*"I Samuel B. Chipfellow, have made a great deal of money during*



my active years. The time now comes when I must decide what will become of it after my death. I have made my decision, but I remain in the peculiar position of still not knowing what will become of it. Frankly, I'm of the opinion that no one will ever benefit from it—that it will remain in the place I have secreted it until the end of time."

A murmur went up from the crowd.

"A treasure hunt!" someone cried. "I wonder if they'll distribute maps!"

Carter Hagen raised his hand. "Please! Let's have a little more order or the reading will not continue."

The room quieted and Hagen's droning voice was again raised: "This place consists of a vault I have had erected upon my grounds. This vault, I assure you, is burglar-proof, weather-proof, cycloneproof, tornadoproof, bombproof. Time will have no effect upon its walls. It could conceivably be thrown free in some great volcanic upheaval but even then the contents would remain inaccessible.

"There is only one way the vault can be opened. Its lock is sensitized to respond to a thought. That's what I said—a thought. I have selected a single, definite, clear-cut thought to which the combination will respond.

"There is a stone bench in front of the vault door and I decree that any person who wishes, may sit down on this bench, and direct his or her thought at the door. If it is the correct one, the door will open and the person causing this to happen shall then be the possessor of all my worldly wealth which lies inside.

"Because of the number of persons who will no doubt wish to try their luck, I decree further that each shall be given thirty seconds in which to project their thought. A force of six men shall be hired to supervise the operation and handle the crowds in the neighborhood of the vault. A trust fund has been already set up to pay this group. The balance of my wealth lies awaiting the lucky thinker in the vault—all save this estate itself, an item of trifling value in comparison to the rest, which I bequeath to the State with the stipulation that the other terms of the will are rigidly carried out.

And so, good luck to everyone in the world. May one of you succeed in opening my vault—although I doubt it. Samuel B. Chipfellow. P. S. The thought-throwing shall begin one week after the reading of the will. I add this as a precaution to keep everyone from rushing to the vault after this will is read. You might kill each other in the stampede. S. B. C."

There was a rush regardless. Reporters knocked each other down getting to the battery of phones set up to carry the news around the world. And Sam Chipfellow's will pushed all else off the video screens and the front pages.

**D**URING the following weeks, millions were made through the sale of Chipfellow's thought to the gullible. Great commercial activity began in the area surrounding the estate as arrangements were made to accomodate the hundreds of thousands who were heading in that direction.

A line began forming immediately at the gate to Chipfellow's Folly and a brisk market got under way in positions therein. The going figure of the first hundred positions was in the neighborhood of ten thousand dollars. A man three thousand thoughts away was offered a thousand dollars two days before the week was up, and on the last day, the woman at the head of the line sold her position for eighteen thousand dollars.

There were many learned roundtables and discussions as to the nature of Chipfellow's thoughts. The majority leaned to the belief that it would be scientific in nature because Chipfellow was the world's greatest scientist.

This appeared to give scientific-

ally trained brains the edge and those fortunate in this respect spent long hours learning what they could of Chipfellow's life; trying to divine his performance in the realm of thought.

So intense was the interest created that scarcely anyone paid attention to the activities of Chipfellow's closer relatives. They sued to break the will but met with defeat. The verdict was rendered speedily, after which the judge who made the ruling declared a recess and bought the eleven thousandth position in line for five hundred dollars.

On the morning of the appointed day, the gates were opened and the line moved toward the vault. The first man took his seat on the bench. A stopwatch clicked. A great silence settled over the watchers. This lasted for thirty seconds after which the watch clicked again. The man got up from the bench eighteen thousand dollars poorer.

The vault had not opened.

Nor did it open the next day, the next, nor the next. A week passed, a month, six months. And at the end of that time it was estimated that more than twenty-five thousand people had tried their luck and failed.

Each failure was greeted with a public sigh of relief—relief from

both those who were waiting for a turn and those who were getting rich from the commercial enterprises abutting upon the Chipfellow estate.

There was a motel, a hotel, a few night clubs, a lot of restaurants, a hastily constructed bus terminal, an airport and several turned into parking lots at a dollar a head.

The line was a permanent thing and it was soon necessary to build a cement walk because the ever-present hopeful were standing in a ditch a foot deep.

There also continued to be an active business in positions, a group of professional standers having sprung up, each with an assistant to bring food and coffee and keep track of the ever fluctuating market in positions.

And still no one opened Chipfellow's vault.

It was conceded that the big endowment funds had the inside track because they had the money to hire the best brains in the world; men who were almost as able scientifically as had been Chipfellow himself but unfortunately hadn't made as much money. The monied interests also had access to the robot calculators that turned out far more plausible thoughts than there were positions in the line.

A year passed. The vault remained locked.

**B**Y that time the number of those who had tried and failed and were naturally disgruntled, was large enough to be heard, so a rumor got about that the whole thing was a vast hoax—a mean joke perpetrated upon the helpless public by a lousy old crook who hadn't any money in the first place.

Vituperative editorials were written—by editors who had stood in line and thrown futile thoughts at the great door. These editorials were vigorously rebutted by editors and columnists who as yet had not had a chance to try for the jackpot.

One senator, who had tried and missed, introduced a law making it illegal to sit on a stone bench and hurl a thought at a door.

There were enough congressional failures to pass the law. It went to the Supreme Court but was tossed out because they said you couldn't pass a law prohibiting a man from thinking.

And still the vault remained closed.

Until Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, farm people impoverished by reverses, spent their last ten dollars for two thoughts and waited out the hours and the days in line. Their daughter Susan, aged nine, waited with

them, passing the time by telling her doll fairy tales and wondering what the world looked like to a bird flying high up over a tree top. Susan was glad when her mother and father reached the bench because then they all could go home and see how her pet rabbit was doing.

Mr. Wilson hurled his thought and moved on with drooping shoulders. Mrs. Wilson threw hers and was told to leave the bench. The guard looked at Susan. "Your turn," he said.

"But I haven't got any thought," Susan said. "I just want to go home."

This made no sense to the guard. The line was being held up. People were grumbling. The guard said, "All right, but that was silly. You could have sold your position for good money. Run along with your mother and father."

Susan started away. Then she looked at the vault which certain-

ly resembled a mausoleum and said, "Wait—I have too got a little thought," and she popped onto the bench.

The guard frowned and snapped his stop watch.

Susan screwed her eyes tight shut. She tried to see an angel with big white wings like she sometimes saw in her dreams and she also tried to visualize a white-haired, jolly-faced little man as she considered Mr. Chipfellow to be. Her lips moved soundlessly as she said,

*Dear God and all the angels—  
please have pity on poor Mr. Chip-  
fellow for dying and please make  
him happy in heaven.*

Then Susan got off the bench quickly to run after her mother and father who had not waited.

There was the sound of metal grinding upon metal and the great door was swinging open.

THE END



"It's science fiction . . . about a man who invents a vessel capable of crossing a river."



Holloway was used to big game hunters and their expeditions to other worlds. But this trip was sheer madness — a space ship stalking among —

# The Beasts In The Void

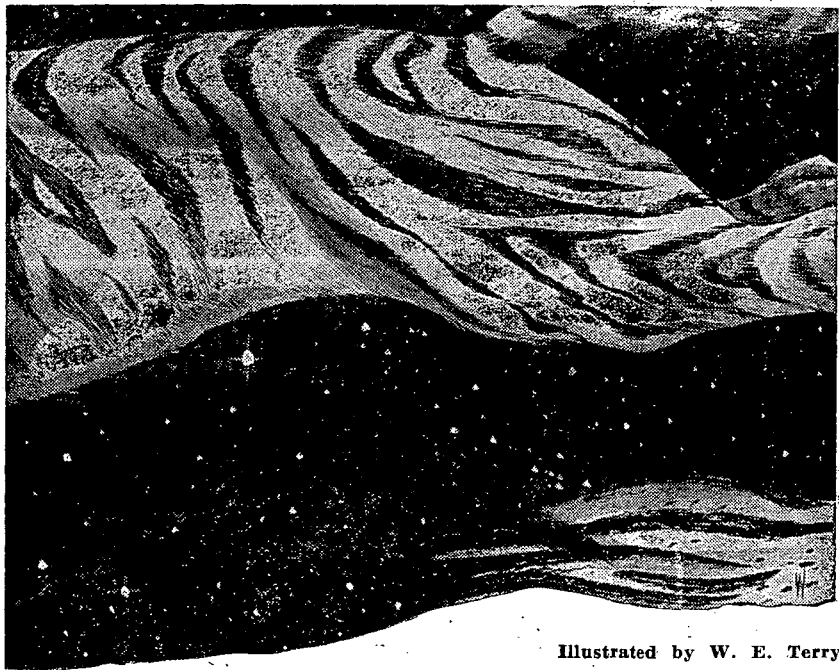
by

*Paul W. Fairman*

**T**HE EXAMINER looked doubtful and said, "But Mr. Holloway, regulations require

that I read your log before I take verbal testimony."

Holloway's face was drawn and



Illustrated by W. E. Terry

ravaged. His bloodshot eyes sat in black pits. They were trained on the Examiner but looked through him rather than at him.

Holloway said, "But; I *must* talk! I've got to tell you about it. I have to keep talking."

"But—"

Holloway's words tumbled 'out. "It started in the control cabin there in deep space. When Mrs. Kelvey came in. She was the blonde one. I turned around and she said, 'Captain, there's a great big tiger in the companionway.'"

The desperate Holloway, fearful of being stopped or running out of words, went into minute detail. "She made the statement as a pouting complaint, almost casually. Then, before I could speak, she realized what she'd said and her face changed. A kind of horrified double-take. '*A tiger? In the companionway of a space ship?*' This last was an incredulous question she asked herself. Then she fainted. I looked outside. I thought I saw something blurred and indistinct but it vanished quickly if it was



really there at all. The companion-way was empty. No tiger. No animal of any kind—”

The Examiner, holding up a hand of protest, looked like a man directing traffic. “Please, Mr. Holloway—please. We must remember regulations.”

Holloway’s eyes closed for a moment but he resolutely forced them open as though afraid of something.

The scene was Holloway’s two-room suite in the Space Port Hotel. There were three men present — Holloway, skipper of the *Space King*. John Mason, Port Resident, and Merle Kennedy, Section Examiner for the Space Authority people. Kennedy regarded Holloway with frank concern. Good heavens—the man was a complete mess. Looked ready to collapse. Kennedy turned to Mason. “This can be postponed, you know.”

Mason was regarding Holloway also. Strange, he thought; Holloway had left in a fanfare of publicity. Now it appeared his return would be even more dramatic. Maybe Holloway was that kind of a chap; the kind things just happened to.

He was quite young though. He certainly didn’t look it now. He’d been known as a playboy ever since his father struck it big in Venusian oil. But good-looking, personable, he had worn the label well. He’d been good copy because the public

regarded him with patronizing affection. To them, he’d been a nice kid having fun; not a young wastrel wasting his father’s money.

Naturally he would pick a glamour girl to play the romantic feminine role and Melody Hayden had filled the bill perfectly. Together, they had enchanted the public. Princess and Prince Charming stuff. Then tragedy. Disaster in a rocketing sports car; Melody’s coffin sealed before the funeral; young Holloway coming off without a scratch. Melody’s death was a bombshell and everyone asked. *What will he do now?* expecting of course, something sensational.

He didn’t let them down. Dramatically, he announced a completely new life. He bought a space ship and foreswore his old ways. He had quite a reputation as a big game hunter. He’d stalked the vicious Plutonian ice bears and lain in Venusian swamps waiting for the ten-ton lizards to rise out of the slime. He had knocked over the wildest of animals, a telepathic Uranian mountain wolf and had dropped in flight a Martian radar-bat, a feat duplicated by only three other marksmen of record.

So what more natural occupation than guiding hunting parties in deep space? Holloway had been obviously torn by Melody’s tragic death. Perhaps out among the stars he could forget.

THERE HAD BEEN some trouble, Mason recalled, in clearing Holloway's first cruise. A party of five. Not to any established hunting ground but a D. U. thing. *Destination Unknown*, and they were always trouble. Clearance had been made, though, and now — here was Holloway back again — dramatically of course — with one of his party dead and the other four in trance-like stupors. Strange.

And stranger still, Holloway's reason for wanting to talk immediately; with no rest — no medical attention:

"It will help keep me awake. I mustn't go to sleep. Can't I make you understand? *I've got to stay awake.*"

Mason pitied the man. He turned to Kennedy. "I have the log here, sir. Perhaps you could go over it now—"

Holloway leaned forward. "I'll tell you what's in the log. Every word of it. If I just sit here waiting—"

Mason laid a hand on his knee. "It's all right, old chap. I won't let you go to sleep. You and I will talk while Mr. Kennedy goes through the log. It won't take long."

Mason handed the book to Kennedy. He was almost apologetic. "It's a strange log, sir, It—"

"Strange?" Kennedy frowned.

Logs had no right to be strange. There were regulations — rules stating exactly how a log should be kept.

"Well sir, the lad is young. His first trip. I just meant there's perhaps a little more in the log than should appear there."

"We'll see," Kennedy said.

There was a slight frost on his words. If disciplinary measures were in the offing it would pay not to get too cozy with Holloway and the Resident.

Kennedy opened the log. The first entry was dated June 3rd, 4:10 p. m. Earth time. Kennedy frowned. Permissible of course, but sloppy, very sloppy. The better skippers computed from Orion immediately after blast-off. Kennedy set back and began to read:

\* \* \*

June 3rd, 4:10 p. m.

We blasted at 2:18 p. m. A good getaway. Course 58.329 by the polar angle. No blast sickness among the passengers. They are old hands. I put the automatic board into control at 3:50 p. m. I checked the tubes. Pressures balanced and equal.

I don't like this cruise. I don't like Murdo. He's a domineering slob. The other four, well — Keebler is an alcoholic, Kelvey an empty-headed opportunist. I don't particularly dislike them. They're just a worthless pair who would



rather fawn on Murdo and take his insults than work for a living. The two wives are both young. Martha Keebler has a child's mind in a woman's body. Jane Kelvey is an oversexed witch with an indecent exposure complex. I may have trouble with her. Already she's parading around in skimpy shorts and a bra. Evidently Murdo doesn't care for women. He pays no attention to her. Money and power are his dish. And a terrible restlessness.

Melody baby — I wish you were here—

\* \* \*

*June 4th, 3:00 p. m.*

I had a talk with Murdo about this silly cruise. Tried to swing him onto something that makes a little more sense. Pluto, Venus, Ganymede — some hunting ground I'm familiar with. No good. Even a suggestion and he thinks you're crossing him and snorts like a bull. Still demands to go to this place where big game prowls in space. Where elephants and leopards and snakes and anything you can name fly around your ship and look in your ports. Where you do your hunting in space suits right out in the void.

Why in hell did I fall for this idiocy? Guess I just didn't care. Maybe I thought it was a good idea because it sounded like a cruise you could get killed on with-

out much trouble. No—I shouldn't say that. Melody wouldn't like me to say it. She was so wonderful — so level-headed. How wrong they all were about us. About her. Because she was so beautiful, I guess. I tried to tell them I'd married an angel and they took bets among themselves on how long it would last. The answer to that would have been forever. It still is. I've lost so much and learned so much in such a very short time. The hell with Murdo and his four puppets. I'll take them out and bring them back. Then I'll go somewhere alone and I won't come back at all.

Melody.

Course 28.493 by the polar angle. Went through small asteroid field . . .

KENNEDY looked up sharply. He frowned. This log is unacceptable."

Holloway was pacing the floor, his eyes blank and terrible "Unacceptable?"

"Course and position should be noted within each twenty-four hour period. You missed June 5th entirely. You—" Kennedy leafed through the pages. "Why at times you missed three and four days in sequence!"

"Sometimes I didn't have time to write."

Mason tried to hide his disgust. How did men like Kennedy get-

into positions they weren't fitted for? The ass! Couldn't he see this man was suffering? Mason said, "Why not reserve comment until you've finished, Mr. Kennedy?"

Kennedy's eyes widened at the sharp tone of Mason's voice. Really. When residents start dictating to Examiners — Kennedy saw the stiffness in Mason's face. And something more. He went quickly back to his reading:

\* \* \*

*June 6, 1:00 p. m.*

I talked some more with Murdo about this fool cruise. He got wind of our destination—wherever it is — from some rich idiot in Paris. And I don't use *idiot* figuratively. His informant was in some kind of a private nut house — an exclusive insane asylum of idiots with lots of money— and he had lucid intervals. At one of these times he told Murdo where he'd been and what had happened. I don't think Murdo believes all of it but he wants to see for himself. Well, if he wants to spend his money chasing meteorites it's his business.

Keebler got drunk as a goat. Strapped him in his bunk and left him there. Murdo spent a few hours explaining guns to Mr. Keebler. I think he enjoys the look of wonder on her face. Makes him feel very superior knowledgewise. Her face is just built that way and so far as she's concerned he could

be talking Greek. He thinks she's very beautiful. I wonder if he ever saw Melody's picture?

Course 36.829 by the Orion angle. All clear.

\* \* \*

*June 9th, 1:00 a. m.*

Course 36.841 by the Orion angle. Small-asteroids.

Jane Kelvey is bored and has started taking it out on me. When I passed her door it was open. She was taking a sponge bath, stark naked in the middle of the cabin. She turned around to face me and did a very bad job of acting flustered, trying to cover herself up with a small sponge! How crude can a female get? She was hoping I'd come in. If I had it would have been to slap her face. I got away as fast as I could.

\* \* \*

*June 10th, 7 p. m.*

Course 41.864 by the Orion angle. Brushed a small asteroid.

I've been noting the time wrong. It should be figured on a twenty-four-hour cycle. Midnight to midnight, the hell with it.

Had a fight with Murdo. He wanted to take over the ship. His words were, "Let's get some speed out of this slop bucket." I reminded him I was Captain. He reminded me he was footing the bills. I asked him how he would like to be locked in his cabin for the remainder of the cruise? He didn't say, but

I guess he wouldn't have liked it because he quieted down. Keebler has been quietly drunk for the last two days. Lucky Keebler.

\* \* \*

*June 13th, 18 hours.*

Course 26.932 by the Virgo angle. Went four degrees off course to avoid small planetoid.

Jane Kelvey came to my cabin an hour ago. The rest were asleep. She wore a blue dressing gown with nothing under it. I want to set down what happened in case there's ever a kickback, although I don't think there ever will be.

I was sitting in a chair and she came up behind me and it was very unfortunate because I saw the blue dressing gown first. By sheer chance it was almost exactly like the one Melody wore that first night. I was thinking of Melody. Melody was all around me and inside me. In my mind, in my heart, in all my aching regrets.

So when that dressing gown brushed me, something electric happened inside and I got up and took Jane Kelvey in my arms. It wasn't more than three or four seconds but in that time the gown had been brushed aside. Then I came to my senses and pushed her away.

The dressing gown stayed parted. She stepped back, confused. She said, "What's the matter? Are you scared?"

"I'm disgusted. Button your gown. Get out of here!"

"What are you? Not one of those noble creatures I hope — who wouldn't touch a man's wife."

"I said get out! I wouldn't touch you regardless."

"But you just did."

"It was a mistake. I —"

"Look— I'm a woman. You're a man — I think. We're alone in space and life is short. Let's have fun and then forget about it."

I slapped her across the mouth. A skipper can be jailed for life for striking a passenger. Even with cause. But I slapped her and I'm setting it down in the log . . .

KENNEDY looked up from his reading. "Jane Kelvey — she is the dead one?"

Mason nodded.

Kennedy looked at Holloway with marked severity. "Are you sure you only slapped her?"

Mason exploded. "Good God, man. Did you see the body? You're not implying he did that to her are you?"

"I'm not implying anything," Kennedy said within a restrained grimness that infuriated Mason.

"Why don't you finish the log before you start passing judgment?"

Kennedy leafed through the pages. "I — wait a minute! This log doesn't cover the whole cruise!

It breaks off in the middle of a sentence!"

"Read what's there, man! Read what's there."

"Very serious — very serious," Kennedy muttered. "Not completing a log. No license should have been issued this man. Lax! Very lax." He sat back to make himself more comfortable and prepared to go on with his reading.

\* \* \*

*June 30th — 3 hours*

Course 29.341 by the Virgo angle. I think that's the course. The instruments are acting funny. In fact a lot of things seem to be wrong. Some of the constellations aren't in the right places anymore.

I began noticing these things a couple of days ago and spoke to Murdo. I suggested we turn back. I told him it was my duty as a skipper to look out for the welfare of my passengers. And that included not continuing if vital instruments showed signs of failure.

He sneered at me and said, "I thought you were a big game hunter, Holloway?"

I told him I'd hunted big game —yes.

"It doesn't sound like it. You sound like a timid old woman. So you've made some miscalculations. The course is still right. It's on the flight pattern in the automatic control board and I know it's correct because I gave it to you."

"But if instruments fail nothing stays right."

"Okay — you're the skipper. If you've turned yellow and want to show your tail I guess there's nothing I can do about it."

He almost got his jaw broken, but I was able to hold myself. Then, suddenly, I didn't care. I didn't care whether Murdo stayed alive or got killed. As to the others —they'd come on the cruise with their eyes open. They deserved whatever they got. And I certainly didn't give a damn about myself. Guess I wasn't cut out to skipper a ship. A skipper should care. That's all he *should* do. Just care. I'd rather dream about Melody.

\* \* \*

I don't know what the date is. The chronometer stopped so I don't even know what time it is. But what does it matter about the time if you don't even know what day it is? We just go on and on.

Murdo — I can't figure out. Windbag or not — braggart or no he — has an iron will. I think he's scared but he won't admit it. And some stubborn streak inside him won't let him turn tail and run. He hides his fear behind long accounts of his hunting trips. He describes the vicious animals he's killed. He bores us with accounts of his skill as a great hunter.

The rest listen because they

have to. I go to my cabin and remember Melody.

The rest are scared too, but they're too scared of Murdo to let him know it. That's an odd one. Scared for your life but afraid to tell the big man because he might kill you. Would Murdo kill in a fit of rage? I don't know.

Keebler stays drunk so none of it bothers him. Keebler's wife, I think, is in love with Murdo but it's a kind of little-girl love. She never quite grew up. Kelvey glues himself to Murdo and sticks like a plaster. He seems to consider Murdo a haven, as though Murdo's bulk will make everything all right.

Jane Kelvey hasn't quit making passes at me but they're half-hearted. She bothers me. I'm uneasy when she's around. I get the feeling that any minute she might drop to her knees and beg. What do you do with a woman on her knees before you, begging? Maybe before long her husband will look good to her. Maybe she'll be able to get him away from Murdo's side for a while.

I look at both these women and realize what I lost. Melody.

\* \* \*

**J**ANE KELVEY came to my cabin. It's hit her that things aren't right. She's scared. She asked, "Why did you tell Murdo you wanted to turn back?"

"Because I thought we'd come too far."

"Do you still think so?"

"Everything will be all right."

"The instruments — are they working again?"

I lied to her. "They're working."

"Do you think it's really as Murdo says—that there are animals out in space?"

"I don't know."

She looked wan and forlorn and I was sorry for her. She said, "I've only been on one hunting trip in my life."

"Is that so?"

"In India. A boy carried my gun for me. When the tiger came the boy handed me the gun and told me where to point. I fired but I didn't hit the tiger. Somebody else shot it."

"That was too bad."

"No, it was all right. He was such a big beautiful animal. So sleek and powerful."

I saw her body tremble as she closed her eyes. I said, "You better get some rest."

She passed a hand over her eyes and then gave me an odd wistful smile. "Animals are smarter, I think. We do make awful messes out of our lives, don't we?"

"I'm afraid we do."

"But is it our fault? God makes us this way. We can't help that."

"No, I guess we can't."

"Why did God make us like

we are?"

"I don't know, Jane. Let's hope *He* does."

"Isn't that sacrilege or something? Doubting Him?"

"I guess it is."

She reached out suddenly and touched my face. "You're a nice guy. I don't blame you for slapping me."

"I'm sorry. You're pretty nice yourself."

The smile faded. "I'm not," she said miserably, and left the cabin.

Poor kid. I forgot her and thought of Melody.

\* \* \*

Something's gone wrong with everything. Not a very scientific statement for a skipper to make but that's how it is. The stars have disappeared. The instruments jumped around as though they had minds of their own. The dial needles spin around like crazy.

And something else — something even worse. Space has *changed*. I mean there's something out there in space. First I just felt it. A raw uneasiness. Then I trained a light through the port and I could see it. Stuff that looks like dust but isn't. It's hazy and yet it sparkles and you have a sense of being on a ship that's pushing its way through a fog so thick the friction holds you back. And there's something more about this sparkling fog. You look out at it

and it seems to be looking back at you. Or maybe I'm losing my mind. Anyhow, that's the way it seems. As though it's waiting for you to speak to it — say hello or something.

I guess I'm going crazy.

The sparkling fog is affecting the others, too. They've all quieted down and they slip along the bulkheads as though they were being followed. Only Murdo blusters back. He says, what the hell? We expected something different didn't we? Well, this is sure different enough, isn't it?

I'd turn back but I don't know how. I have nothing to go by. The instruments make no sense.

\* \* \*

I *am* going crazy. I looked out the port just now and saw a water buffalo. It was standing right out there in space with its head down looking at the ship! I had a light turned on it and suddenly it charged and hit the port headon. It bounced off and went staggering away and disappeared.

But it left a big white scratch on the quartz outside. At least I think it did. Wait. I'll look again. Yes. A big white scratch. It's still there. So how can I be mad? Maybe it's a new kind of madness . . .

\* \* \*

**S**OME OF THE sparkling fog has penetrated the ship. Turn out the light and you can see it in

the cabin. Not as thick as out in the void but thick enough to see; thick enough to stand there and ask you to talk to it.

Murdo is ready to turn back. He came to the control room and said, "I saw it out there."

"You saw what?"

His face was pale and his hands twitched. A boa-constrictor. Exactly like the one I killed four years ago on the Amazon. It came to the port and looked in at me."

"It must be your imagination."

"No. It was there. Let's turn back. Get out of this."

"I wish we could."

"You mean—?"

"I don't know where back is. We might just as well go as we are. Changing course doesn't help if you don't know your directions. Our only hope is to drive on out of this cloud. If I turned I might go right back into it."

"Then one direction is as good as another?"

"That's right."

His mind wandered as he turned away. "I didn't know it would be like this," he muttered. "I thought it would be fun — sport. I thought we'd put on space suits and go out and make a kill. I thought—"

"The space suits are ready. Do you want to try it?"

He shuddered, his hanging jowls almost flapping. "You couldn't

drag me out there."

\* \* \*

The stuff is getting thicker in the ship.

\* \* \*

Jane came into my cabin. She had an odd look on her face. She said, "There's a big tiger in the companionway."

I got up from my bunk and suddenly she seemed to realize what she'd said. She repeated it. Then she fell down in a faint. I put her in my bunk and looked out into the companionway. The sparkling fog glittered but there was no tiger.

When she came to, she didn't seem to know where she was. Then she smiled. "I must have been drinking too much," she said. Then she realized where she was. "But look where it got me? Into your bunk."

"Do you feel all right now?"

"I guess so. I can get up now. I *do* have to get up, don't I?"

"I think you'd better."

After she left I did some thinking. The sparkling haze had been outside the ship and I'd seen a water buffalo through the port. Murdo had seen a boa-constrictor. Then the haze penetrated the hull and got inside the ship. And Jane had seen a tiger in the companionway.

Were they phantoms? Was

Jane's tiger a tiger of the mind? Murdo swore his snake had been real and my buffalo left a mark on the port. I sat there trying to think. With the sparkling fog drifting around me. It seemed to be trying to tell me something.

\* \* \*

Things grow worse. Today, at mess, Murdo was holding forth about a Plutonian ice bear he'd killed. I think he was trying to cover the gloom that has settled over us. Anyhow, he'd just got to the point where the bear was charging down on him when we heard the roar of thunder from outside. Maybe, I'd better repeat that for the record. *We heard a roaring through the walls of the space ship. In the void.* Nothing goes through the walls of a space ship in the void but we all heard it and jumped to the port. And we all saw it.

An ice bear as big as ten of the largest that ever lived in the Pultonian ice flows. A huge ravening beast that rushed through the void at the ship and tried to tear the port out of its metal seat with teeth as big as the height of a man.

The women fell back, screaming. Keebler, in his usual stupor stared blankly as though not realizing what was going on. Kelvey looked to Murdo for guidance. When none came he crouched behind a chair.

Murdo fell back slowly, step by step as though his eyes were fastened to the quartz and it was hard to pull away. I don't remember what I did. Murdo was saying "My God — my God—my God," as though chanting a ritual. He tore his eyes from the sight and looked at me.

"You wanted big game, buster," I croaked. "There it is."

"But it can't be real. It *can't!*"

"Maybe not, but if that port gives I'll bet it won't be from vacuum pressure."

"Vaccuum draws. It doesn't press," Kelvey babbled inanely, but nobody paid any attention to him.

The beast made two more charges on the ship, then drew back screaming in rage from a snapped tooth. And all around us, there in the ship, the sparkling fog glittered and tried to talk.

\* \* \*

Two hours. The beast still rages in the void outside our ship.

\* \* \*

**J**ANE IS DEAD. She was horribly mangled. I put her in her bunk and laid a blanket over her and now the blanket is soaked in her blood.

No one could have helped her. It happened in the lounge. She was in there alone. I was in the control room. I don't know where the rest were.



I was working uselessly with the controls when I heard a terrible scream mixed with a hideous snarling. I ran into the companionway and stared toward the lounge. Murdo appeared from somewhere and we were shouldering each other on the companion ladder. Murdo fell heavily. Then we were both looking into the lounge.

It was too late to help Jane. We saw her there, still and bloody. A shiny black leopard was crouching gory-mouthed over her body with its paws on her breast. Its eyes were black magnets, holding mine.

I said, "Get a gun," trying to speak without moving my lips.

"But—"

"Damn you — get a gun!"

Murdo staggered away. It seemed a year before he came back with a Hinzie Special .442. The leopard was tight, ready to spring. I didn't dare move a muscle. I said, "Over my shoulder. Get him. Don't miss."

That last was a little silly. How could a man miss with a Hinzie at ten feet? Murdo fired and tore the leopard's head off. It was down already so it didn't move. It sat there headless, its tail twitching slightly. Then it was still.

I didn't hesitate this time. I said, "Come on. We've got to get this out of here before the others show."

We put the dead leopard into the forward storage bunker. Then I picked up poor Jane and carried her to her room. Murdo helped me up the ladder. The others were in the companionway and they pressed back in horror to let me pass. For the first time since we'd started, Keebler was sober. Ashen, shaking, stone sober. He broke; screamed and ran for his bottle, the world of reality too terrible for him to bear.

There was no huddle, no conference, no meeting of the minds. Everyone else went to the galley and sat staring into space; stared at the dancing little sparkles in the air.

I went to my cabin.

\* \* \*

When confronted by a reality no matter how crazy and improbable, a man must not turn from it. He can not carry the mangled body of a woman in his arms and then say to himself: *This isn't real because it doesn't make sense. It does make sense — some kind of sense or it would not exist. A man must say rather: I don't understand this and maybe I never will but God gave me a brain and I must try. I can't sit back and deny reality. I must try to understand it.* I cleared my mind and tried to rationalize the things around us.

Out in the darkness there was a

terrible roaring and yammering. The thuds and bellows of violence. I went to the port.

There, in the light from the ship, the ice bear and the water buffalo were fighting. It was a terrible and magnificent thing but to me it was anticlimax; a side-show of almost casual interest.

The ice bear outsized the water buff by too much to be in any danger, but the buff fought savagely and the ice bear had no easy time. The buff opened a long deep gash in the bear's throat when the bear missed a lunge and the Plutonian mammal fell back with a roar of pain and fury. They came together again and this time the bear got the buff in a hug and it was all over. The buff's spine broke and the bear bent the body double, then tore it to pieces. I wondered if the others were watching.

I went back to pacing; back to my thinking.

I have been thinking, thinking, thinking; wracking my brain. And of one thing I am sure. Some invisible intelligence is trying to help me; trying to give me knowledge. The sparkling fog?

\* \* \*

**A** GREAT and wonderful thing has happened.

And I know. Do you realize what that means? To know in a

situation like this? And to be wonderfully and wildly happy? The knowledge was not all given me. There was a thought process of my own developing. The thing given me was the basic knowledge upon which to build. And proof of this knowledge. Absolute and indisputable proof.

*The sparkling fog is mind stuff.*

I will not defend that statement. I will not rationalize it. But I will seek explanations; consider possibilities.

Known: This sparkling fog through which we drift is intelligent matter; the stuff of thoughts; the basic material from which consciousness springs. It is consciousness itself.

Supposed: It is probably electronuclear in composition, and appears to be completely innocent. By that I mean it has no intention to harm, perhaps because it does not understand the difference between good and evil, harm and help, pain and pleasure.

It has only one urge; the basic urge of all creation. To evolve, to develop. As the tree has but one basic urge — to grow and greaten; the flower but one desire — to bloom, to improve; to assert itself through evolution and become better.

Perhaps — and who can successfully deny it?—this great space

cloud could be a storage place of the Creator Himself; a storage place for mind stuff. When an infant or an animal or a plant is touched with the magic thing called life — where does that magic come from? Is it created at the very moment or does it come somehow from a source-pile? Is this cloud a source-pile of life itself? No one can say. But I think I've hit on a limitation of this mind stuff. I'm going to try an experiment and pray to God it works.

I'm going to find Murdo and knock him unconscious.

\* \* \*

I have solved the mind-stuff. What just happened is the last bit of proof I need: I went to the galley. Murdo had wandered away. I found him in the lounge. I stepped casually in front of him, set myself, and drove a straight right to his jaw. He went down like a log.

I closed my eyes and counted to twenty praying to God to make me right in my belief — in the crazy theory I evolved. I opened my eyes and turned to the storage locker. I looked inside.

The dead leopard was gone.

I went to the port and looked out. The huge ice bear had been ravening insanely among the shreds of the water buffalo's body. As I watched both bear and buff began fading.

Before my eyes, they disappeared, evolved back into the stuff of the sparkling fog. I had proved my theory.

Now all the parts dropped into place. The mind stuff has only the ability and the urge to evolve— nothing else — no imagination. It can evolve only if given something to reproduce.

This it can get only from a human mind. It is able to see an image pictured in the human memory and reproduce it in a state of absolute reality.

Witness: Jane saw a tiger in the companionway. Clear in her memory was the image of the tiger she had shot at in India. The mind-stuff saw it and reproduced it in reality. The water buffalo came from my own mind. I killed one exactly like it a year ago. The ice bear was out of Murdo's memory as was the black leopard and the snake.

Witness: The three animals created inside the ship did not appear until the mind stuff from outside penetrated the hull and entered the ship. They were of normal size. But the animals created outside the ship were far out of proportion, the ice bear especially. Why? Because, I believe, the mind stuff is denser in the void. There it has more strength.

My defense against the mind

stuff was formulated almost accidentally. I remembered the sequence of Jane's tiger. She saw it, entered my cabin, realized its significance, and fainted. I looked into the companionway and saw the tiger fading.

So I knocked out Murdo for final proof and got it. As soon as he lapsed into unconsciousness the recreations from his mind turned back into sparkling fog. Obviously, and a heaven-sent phenomenon it is — the mind stuff immediately loses its subject-image when the mind from which it came goes unconscious. The mind-stuff has no memory of its own and cannot hold its recreated image in the evolved form under conditions of unconsciousness. The answer now becomes simple.

\* \* \*

I drugged Murdo before he regained consciousness. I drugged the other three by means of whisky and food. They have been unconscious for twelve hours. Nothing has happened. I shall keep them that way.

\* \* \*

The mind-stuff is trying to complain to me. Almost petulantly; as a child. I sense it sharply. It does not understand the wrong it has done and feels it has been deprived of its right.

\* \* \*

I have no time for the mind-stuff. I guard myself against it and ignore it. There are other things on my mind. Shall I go back if we ever escape from the sparkling fog? I don't know. I don't want to go back. I want to go on and on forever just like this. But the others cannot go on like this. It would be murder. I don't know. — I don't know.

\* \* \*

I must keep awake. I use drugs. I must not sleep — not sleep.

\* \* \*

We have cleared the fog. The instruments are working again. Again the stars glow. What shall I do. *Melody . . .*

KENNEDY looked up from his reading. "As I said," — and he spoke severely — "you break off at an abrupt point. You did not complete the log."

Holloway's red eyes were glazed. "I had other things to do. I was tired of keeping a log."

Mason sought to draw Kennedy off his quarry. "There's an odd point," he said, looking at Holloway. "Only animals were recreated. Do you think the mind stuff was capable only of recreating animals?"

Holloway spoke in an exhausted monotone. "It took the clearest image from the strongest minds."

Murdo thought mainly of hunting. He pondered on his more spectacular kills. Thus the mind-stuff used his images."

"I see."

Holloway seemed to sag—to shrink. He said, "The mind-stuff could recreate anything. It brought Melody back to me."

Kennedy sprang to his feet. "There is no reference in this log to—"

Mason turned on him. "Shut up, you fool!" He laid a gentle hand on Holloway's shoulder. "Tell us about it, old chap."

Holloway turned his burning eyes on the closed door to the next room. "She's in there. I wanted to get rid of you. I was afraid you would take her away from me. But it's no use. I can't hold my consciousness much longer. Then she will vanish."

Holloway tried weakly to rise from his chair. He called, "Melody—Melody baby!"

The door opened. A beautiful girl in a blue dressing gown came gracefully into the room. She walked straight to Holloway and took his tortured head into her soft hands. Her eyes pleaded with the men. "He suffers so. He will not sleep. I can't make him sleep. I—I don't understand."

Holloway's head dropped suddenly onto his chest. He slumped

down in his chair. And as he did so, a change took place. The two men stood rooted, staring.

As Melody began to fade. Slowly, slowly, into a transparent image, into a mist, into a handful of sparkling fog.

Then she was gone.

Mason knelt by the bone-thin body in the chair. He made a quick examination and got wearily to his feet.

"Holloway is dead," he murmured. "Drugs of that nature would kill an elephant. I can't understand how he lived so long."

Kennedy blinked and seemed to come out of a trance. He frowned. "And the investigation hardly started."

Mason shook his head and looked pityingly at Kennedy. It was just no use with a man like him. Mason said, "There's one point entirely apparent without an investigation."

"What's that?"

Mason's voice was sharp and cold. "That our little playboy, for all his reputation of frivolity, was a better man than you and I put together. Does that register, Mr. Kennedy?"

Kennedy flared. "Now see here. I'm only doing my job!"

"Oh shut up," Mason said.

And strode out of the room.

THE END



# Satellite



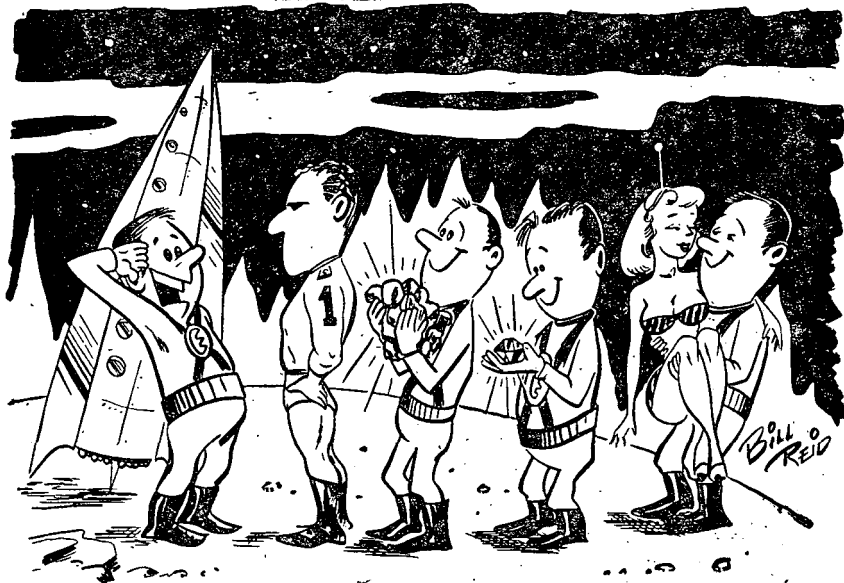
THE much-discussed and long promised satellite which the Government soon will throw into the skies, will be one of the remarkable accomplishments of our times, concerning how short a time it was since the only use the hard-headed "realists" could see for rocket power was the bombardment of cities!

The fact that the satellite will be only a foot or so in diameter, will remain in the sky for a few days only, and will be at a relatively modest height, doesn't detract at all from the power of the conception. For this is really a first prolonged

step into space.

The Russians' announcement that they too will try for the sky has no one worried. On the contrary, the U.S. has proposed—and hopes—that the Russians will make it a joint effort. Other European countries are clamoring to aid and assist. With world action like this, how can we fail to reach the Moon within the century?

It's a difficult job, but the space satellite is the first and necessary step. With its success—and it will be successful—the Moon-trip will follow . . .



"Three of the crew have struck it rich, sir!"

# ZERO HOUR

by

*Alexander Blade*

**By accident Bobby discovered the rocket was about to be shot to the Moon. Naturally he wanted to go along. But could he smuggle himself aboard?**

Illustrated by Lloyd Rognan

DAD HAD already gone when Bobby got up. This disappointed Bobby a little but then he remembered—*this was the big day*. Naturally Dad would get over to the project early. And at four o'clock—Bobby shivered deliciously at the thought of it.

He ate his breakfast in silence with Mom across the table drinking a cup of coffee and looking at a fashion catalogue. He was glad she was occupied because he didn't want to talk; not today he didn't. Might spill something secret. Might even let out the *big secret*. That would be terrible.

Of course, all things were secret at Buffalo Flats. So secret top scientists like Dad didn't even discuss them with wives like Mom. And wives like Mom never asked.

So it was really something to sit

there eating breakfast knowing that today, Dad was going to rocket to the Moon. And with Mom not even knowing the Lunar project was in the works, so naturally not dreaming that he was going *with Dad*! The thrill was overpowering.

Maybe they would have radio communication after they got there and he would call back and say, *Hello, Mom! Guess where I am? On the moon with Dad!* And Mom would say, *Why Bobby! Scaring me to death like this! I was looking all over for you.* Sounding very angry but not being really angry after all. Because maybe Dad would cut in and say, *Yeah, he's right here with me, dear. What do you think of this boy of ours?*

Bobby gulped the last of his cereal so he could go outside and wriggle for joy. As he got up from







his chair, Mom said, "And what's your plan for today, young man? Davy Crockett or Buck Rogers?"

Bobby had a quick thought—a sudden temptation. Why not give Mom a hint? Why he could even tell her and she still wouldn't know. Then later, after he was gone, she would remember back and say, *That boy! When he tells you something he really means it.*

Bobby smiled and said, "I think I'll go to the moon today."

Mom smiled too and went back to her fashions. "Well, see to it your fuel mixture is correct."

"I'll check it. And Mom—I might not be home for lunch."

"Where will you be?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Well, mind your manners and say thank you when you leave."

Mrs. Kendall, still smiling, watched Bobby dash out into the yard. Living on a restricted government area had one compensation at least. You didn't have to worry about your children. Four dozen families, all with offspring, trapped behind ten-foot patrolled fence. Here, nobody worried about their children. They came and went and at noon a mother fed whatever number happened to be in the house at the time. Mrs. Kendall usually drew six or seven. It would be a relief to dodge the chore for one Saturday . . .

OUT IN THE backyard, Bobby fussed around his space rocket a little; tightening a screw here—hammering in a nail there. Just until he could slip away without Mom noticing his direction.

It wasn't a bad Rocket at that, he thought. Six feet long with two seats and a keen instrument panel. But kid stuff of course. After he found the way in through the sewer he hadn't paid any more attention to his own ship.

He could see Mom through the window, back in her book, so he went casually out through the back gate and turned left, kicking at pebbles as he sauntered along and trying to look as though he had no place to go. Had to be careful. Didn't want to bump into any of the other kids today, either.

The way in through the sewer was at a place behind Laboratory B. There was a kind of an alley there that nobody ever walked through and then this round lid you could lift up and look under. And a ladder you could climb down.

Bobby hadn't dared go down at first. But after thinking about it over night his curiosity won out and he went back and ducked down into the lower level. He called it a sewer because of sewers being underground but this place was clean and had bunches of wires

strung in every direction and faint little lights you could see by.

Bobby went further and further every trip he took, never telling anybody because you weren't supposed to talk about things at Buffalo Flats—not even to the other kids.

Then he found the big drome where they were building the rocket. It was so sleek and beautiful and shiny that he just stared at it—up through the grating in the floor that was for air circulation or something.

He didn't know it was the moon rocket at first. Not until he'd gone back several times to peek up at it and then one day two scientists came walking along right in front of his nose.

One of them was Dad.

Bobby almost called out but he caught himself and just listened to them talking. This was the first time his conscience bothered him about going underneath the drome. He thought about it a lot—whether it was the right thing to do. And while he was never able to still his conscience completely, he quieted down by saying he really wasn't doing any harm because he'd never told anybody what he saw.

He learned the rocket was going to the moon by listening to Dad and the other scientists talk when they thought they were alone. And

it was funny. Because even there, they spoke in low voices and didn't give too much away.

He had known now for three days that at four o'clock the roof would open and the drome would be turned into a blast-pit and the rocket would shoot out through space to the moon.

That was all he *did* know for sure. None of the men had said who was going on the first trip to the moon. Nothing had been said on that subject at all, but Bobby knew Dad would go. He would have to. After all, Dad was the second biggest scientist at Buffalo Flats. Second only to Schleimmer himself and Professor Schleimmer was very old and certainly wouldn't make the trip. That left Dad. Dad would just have to go in order to run the rocket. There probably wasn't anybody else smart enough in the whole place.

The idea of going himself had been born the previous day—when he found a larger grating in the floor near the rocket and realized if he was very careful he could climb out of the sewer and duck into the rocket when nobody was looking. Once inside he was pretty sure he'd find a place to hide until blast-off.

All the men would probably be strapped in bunks but if he found a place he could wedge himself in

he didn't think he'd get hurt. Then, halfway to the moon he would come out and find Dad and would he be surprised!

At first, thinking about it, he'd been scared but after he realized how proud Dad and Mom would be, he made up his mind.

Now, crouched beside the grating near the ship, he waited while two men—technicians in white overalls—walked by.

One of them said, "Well, whatever happens, she'll make a big splash."

"You said it. Hope the brains know what they're doing."

That made Bobby mad. Who said Dad didn't know what he was doing? Dad was just about the smartest scientist in the world.

After the two men left he waited a long time. He heard voices but no one came in sight. Taking a deep breath, he opened the grating and got out. It was only four steps to the open port of the rocket. There was a little ramp they'd used to roll things in and Bobby's feet touched it but lightly as he jumped into the ship. He found himself in some kind of a store room. It would be a good place to hide all right. It was full of aluminum barrels all the same size. He found a space between two rows and sat down and got his breath back. It was very quiet around him.

Scary quiet. But he set his lips firmly.

He was going to the moon with Dad.

**J**OHNN KENDALL was a little late that night. He kissed his wife and said, "Well, did you see the big sky rocket?"

"How could I miss it, darling? Your supper is in the oven."

"I could use a Martini first."

"Coming right up."

While Myra fixed the drink John lay back in his easy chair and closed his eyes. "We'd hoped to stage a little ceremony at the launching but Washington said no."

"The Russians?"

"The Eastern Coalition. It was a race. That was why it had to be so secret. Washington said, light the fuse and fire the thing."

"Is it still hush-hush?"

"No. Not between us at least. We fired an explosion rocket at the moon. It will hit in about an hour and telescopes will show a big purple spot when our explosives go off and throw dye all over the place."

Myra handed him a dry Martini. "I see. Lots of fun no doubt but what's the purpose? Fourth of July on the moon?"

"Oh, no. If the experiment is a success the next rocket will carry men instead of a bomb."

Myra went to the kitchen to see about supper. John called, "Where's Bobby? In bed I suppose."

Myra didn't hear and John set his drink down and moved toward the bedroom. Maybe he was still awake.

Bobby rolled over. His eyes popped open. "Dad! I thought you went to—"

John Kendall sat down on the edge of the bed and tousled his son's hair. "No son. It's the old *terra firma* for me. Did you see the rocket blast?"

"Uh-huh. It was really something. It went to the moon, didn't it?"

"That's right," Kendall smiled and thought. Try to keep a secret from the kids. It just can't be done. "How's *your* moon rocket coming along, son?"

"Pretty good. Gee, Dad! As long as you didn't go, I'm glad I didn't go either."

"You were planning to make the trip also?"

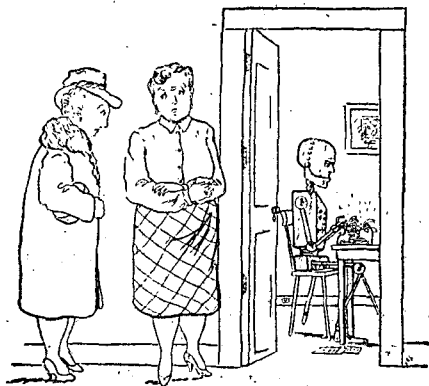
"Uh-huh. I got into the rocket and was all set but I got to thinking about Mom—how one of us should stay and take care of her in case anything happened."

"Smart thinking, son. Now you get to sleep. I'll have a little time tomorrow. We'll play some ball."

"That will be keen!"

John Kendall smiled as he left the bed room. Kids were wonderful! Give them a few old boards and a steering wheel and they could build a ship to fly to the moon. What a wonderful dream world they lived in!

Too bad they had to grow out of it.



"I know it's rather unusual, but most of my roomers are fraternity students. Said he belonged to Alpha Centauri."

Adam Slade was a man who had nothing to lose by making a break for it. The trouble was, he knew that no one had ever escaped from the—

# Prison Of A Billion Years

by

C. H. Thames

Illustrated by H. W. McCauley

**A**DAM SLADE crushed the guard's skull with a two foot length of iron pipe. No one ever knew where Slade got the iron pipe, but it did not seem so important.

The guard was dead. That was important.

And Slade was on the loose. With a hostage.

That was even more important.

The hostage's name was Marcia Lawrence. She was twenty-two years old and pretty and scared half out of her wits. She was, before she became a hostage, a reporter for Interplanetary Video. She had been granted the final pre-execution interview with Adam Slade and she had looked forward to it a long time but it had not worked out as planned.

It had not worked out as planned because Slade, only hours from

the execution chamber with absolutely nothing to lose, had splattered the guard's brains around the inside of his cell and marched outside with a frightened Marcia Lawrence.

Outside. Outside the cell block while other condemned prisoners roared and shouted and banged tin cups on bars and metal walls and judas-hole-grills. Outside the prison compound and across the dome-enclosed city which served the prison.

Then outside the dome.

Outside the dome there was rock. Rock only, twisted and convoluted and thrusting and gigantic like monoliths of a race of giants. Rock alone under the awesome gray sky. Steaming rock, for some of the terrestrial waters were still trapped at great depths. And the sea far off, booming against rocky



headlands, hissing tidally and slowly, in an age-long process, pulverizing the rock. The sea far off, a clean sea, not sea-smelling sea, a sea whose waters must evaporate countless times and be borne up over the naked rocks in vapor and clouds and come down in pelting, endless rain and rush across the rock, frothing and steaming—a sea which must do this countless times in the eons to come, and would do it, to bring salinity to its own waters.

"It kind of scares the hell out of you, doesn't it?" Adam Slade said. He was a big man with a thick neck and heavy, sleepy-looking eyes and a blue beard-shadow on his stubborn jaw. He said those words as he climbed out of the prison tank with Marcia Lawrence. The tank's metal was still warm from over-heated travel.

"I didn't think anything would scare you," Marcia Lawrence said. She had conquered her initial terror in the five hours of clanking tank flight from the prison. They had come a great many miles from the prison dome, paralleling the edge of the saltless sea and then finally, when their fuel was almost gone, clanking and rattling down toward the sea. She was a newspaperwoman, that above all now. She must not be afraid. She had a story here. A story.

"Get moving," Adam Slade said. "I got nothing against you, lady," he told her for the tenth time. "But you try anything, you're dead. You get that? I got nothing to lose. One time is all they can kill me. But first they got to find me, but they won't be able to take me as long as you're here. Just stay meek and you'll stay alive."

"How long do you think you can hold out?" Marcia Lawrence asked practically. They had begun to walk away from the now useless tank. Adam Slade was carrying the dead guard's M-gun in the crook of his bent left arm and walking with long, easy, ground-consuming strides. Marcia almost had to run to keep up with him as they went down a stretch of slightly sloping black rock toward the steaming, hissing, pounding, roaring, exploding surf.

Slade smiled. "Plenty of water," he said.

"But no food, Mr. Slade. There is absolutely no food on earth now and no possible way of getting food unless you want to stick around for a few million years."

"You think I came out here without a plan?" Slade asked with some hostility.

"I don't know. You were desperate."

"As long as you're with me I figure they might follow, but they



won't rush me. They might even send over a 'copter, but it won't try anything. Not with you here. Desperate? I'm not desperate, and don't you forget it. Desperate you don't think straight. Once is all they can execute me. I stayed behind, they'd of done it. If they catch me, they'll do it. What's the difference?"

"You said you had a plan."

THEY REACHED the edge of a thrusting headland, an enormous beak-shaped cliff of beetling black rock which leaned out over the young, still saltless ocean. Slade paced back and forth quickly, with a powerful leonine grace, until he found a fault in the rock. The fault tumbled jaggedly, steeply down almost to the edge of the sea.

"Down there," Slade said. "We'll follow the sea coast back to the prison."

"Back?" Marcia said in disbelief.

"Hell yes, back. You said it yourself. There's no food out here. Since there ain't no life, of course there's no food. Oh, it's a great place for a prison, all right. Whoever thought of it ought to win a prize. A prison—a billion years in the past. What's the word?"

"Archaeozoic," she supplied.

"Yeah, archaeozoic. An arch-

aeozoic prison. You can escape to your heart's content, but what the hell's the difference. There's no life back here, not yet. The Earth's just a baby. So you escape—and you starve to death. It makes every maximum security jail before this one look like a kid's piggy bank."

"There hasn't ever been an escape," Marcia said hopefully as they made their way down to the sea, she in front and Slade behind her with the M-gun.

"There ain't never been a hostage before."

"No-o."

"There's a hostage now."

Marcia Lawrence took a deep breath and asked suddenly, "Are you going to kill me?"

"Hell, I don't know. I got no reason to—unless you make me. We're going back there. We're double-tracking along the beach, get me? Back to the prison dome."

"But—"

"Adam Slade won't starve to death out here. We'll double back to the dome—and the time machine."

"Oh," she said. They began to walk along the edge of the sea, its waters sullen gray, mirroring the sky. Here on this dawn earth the sky has as yet never been blue, for the primordial waters were still falling, falling. It rained almost all the time and the air was thick with

moisture and every night when the sun—as yet unseen by the dawn earth except as an invisible source of light—went down and darkness came, the mists rolled in from the sea. In the morning whether rains had fallen or not the ground was soaked and tiny freshets rushed down to the sea, returning to it.

"Look out!" he cried suddenly, and shoved her against the base of the cliff which overlooked the water. The cliff top thrust out over them, umbrella-wise. The base of the cliff was thus a concavity and they pressed themselves against it now, in shadow. The waters of the infant sea were a hundred yards away, surging and booming against the rock.

She heard it soon after he did. A helicopter. She wanted to scream. She wondered if they would hear her scream. But she looked at Adam Slade's face and did nothing. Soon the helicopter came, buzzing low over them, searching. It circled a great many times because the abandoned tank was there. It circled and came down on the beach and two uniformed figures got out. Now she really wanted to scream. One sound. One sound and they would hear her. One quick filling of the lungs and—

Adam Slade hit her suddenly and savagely and the black loomed up at her but she did not remember

striking it.

When she awoke, the helicopter was gone.

"Sorry I had to poke you one," Slade said. He did not seem sorry at all. He said it automatically and then added: "You ready to walk?"

She nodded. She got up and staggered a few steps before her legs steadied under her. Then with Slade she walked down along the rocky beach. This, she thought, was a story. It was the only big story she had ever had and probably she would not live to write it. As a woman, she was almost hysterical with fear, but as a video-caster she was angry. The story was hers—if she lived to tell it.

Then she had to live.

Time prison. Sure, she thought. Utterly escape proof—unless someone like Slade could take a hostage, double back to the prison dome, the hermetically sealed dome and somehow trick or overpower the guards who watched the time traveling machine outside the prison dome.

Outside. Naturally, it would be outside. That way the prisoners couldn't get at it.

Unless, like Slade, they too were outside.

Outside, where life had not yet been born. Outside, the infant earth. Let a man escape. What did

his escape matter? He would live exactly as long as it took a man, reasonably healthy, to starve to death.

Unless he had a hostage and a plan . . .

**S**HE BECAME aware of rain when they left the cliff overhang. There was almost no wind and the rain came down slowly at first, huge slow drops which splattered on the black rock.

"If it gets any harder," Slade said, "we'll have to duck under the cliff for protection. You don't know what a rain can be like back here. I seen them through the dome."

But they couldn't go under the cliff for protection, not if they wanted to keep going. For the cliff dropped suddenly in a wild jumble of rocks and then there was nothing but the sloping black beach, sloping down to the sea.

Then, all at once, someone opened the sluiceways and the rain bombarded them. It slapped and bounced off the rock like pistol shots. It struck them like hammers. They staggered under its weight.

"We'll have to go back to the cliffs!" Marcia cried. She yelled it again at the top of her voice because she realized, Slade would not hear her otherwise as the rain crackled and exploded and splattered

and crashed. There were no droplets of water. For each one had size and shape and weight, swift-falling, hammering weight as it came down. Each one, Marcia thought wildly, struggling to keep her feet, was the size of your clenched fist there in the gray dawn of Earth.

"The cliffs!" she cried again.

But Adam Slade shook his head, grabbed her arm above the wrist and pulled her after him. He pointed ahead, in the direction they had been going. He said nothing. There was no need to talk. They were going forward and if it killed them probably Adam Slade did not care much.

He wanted that prison time machine for his escape and he was either going to get it or die in the attempt.

They went on slowly. First one would fall and then the other and when it was Slade who had fallen, she would wait patiently, hopefully. If he ever released his hold on the M-gun—

But if it were Marcia who fell, Slade would yank her to her feet savagely, yelling words which she had heard at first but which after a while, after an eternity of the storm, seemed to merge with the sound of the rain and the far booming of thunder out over the water and then, as if by magic, she

was walking again and stumbling along with Slade, drenched and beaten and half-drowned.

She hardly remembered when night came, but presently she was aware of the darkness and the mist over the sea and over the rock and now engulfing them with its white ectoplasmic tendrils. In the mist she knew she could escape Slade, and yet she did not. Without Slade now, now in the middle of nowhere there by the sea on the shores of the young Earth, she would die in the storm. With Slade—at least for now—was life. And she went on.

The thunder followed them—and came closer.

By the middle of the night it sounded like artillery at a distance of half a mile, like a barrage of big atomic shells just out of sight behind a black ridgeline which wasn't there. And through the deeper rain-wet darkness of early morning, through the mist, tearing the mist to tatters, shredding it, came the spears and forks and lances of lightning. It was, Marcia thought, a nightmare of a storm. And she must remember it, for it would make a story, a real story, if ever she lived to tell it.

By morning, the air smelled of ozone. It reeked of ozone and around them as the gray light seeped out of the wet sky and the rain

suddenly slackened as if the weak daylight dispelled it, the black rocks were blasted and broken where lightning had struck.

In the dawn's first light another helicopter came.

"Get down!" Slade shouted, and they dropped among the blasted black rocks, hiding there, not moving. The helicopter came on through the slackening rain, buzzing a few hundred feet over them but not circling. It was heading for the abandoned tank, Marcia thought. It wasn't looking for them here—

But suddenly the rain came down in all its savage force again, blinding bounding off the rocks, pounding relentlessly.

Overhead, the helicopter seemed to pause like a bird stricken in flight. The rotors whirled a silver shield against the rain, the great drops splattering off the shield.

And the helicopter came down under the weight of the rain.

**I**T LANDED a hundred and fifty yards from them down the beach and Marcia watched breathlessly while three men got out and looked at each other and at the rain. The dawn light was still only a dim gray and Marcia could not see the men clearly, but abruptly a jagged spear of lightning blasted rock midway between where they

were hiding and the helicopter and in the after-glare through the wet and almost crackling air, the men were very clear. And clearer still when other lightning came down around them, ringing them in, it seemed, like a tent. There was now so much lightning it looked more like an aurora than an electric storm.

The dawn earth, before life, spending itself in fury . . .

All at once Marcia was running down toward the edge of the water, where the helicopter was. She ran screaming and shouting but the thunder swallowed her puny voice. At every moment she expected Adam Slade to kill her, to merely stand up with the M-gun and shoot her, but he did not and perhaps her unconscious mind in the instant she had fled had instinctively known he would not. For if Adam Slade killed her, he had no hostage. If he killed her and they found him, he would have absolutely no chance.

She turned and looked behind her. There was Slade, silhouetted against the lightning, running, covering the ground in huge strides, gaining on her. She did not look back again. The whole world was lightning and thunder and her legs striking earth under her, up and down, up and down, pounding, running, fleeing, and the rain, Slade's ally, beating her, buffeting her, ex-

ploding against her.

She stumbled and fell but she was up and running again in a moment. Now Slade was very close. But the helicopter was close too. She did not think the men there had seen them yet. She waved her arms and screamed although she knew the screams would not be heard—and then Slade was on her.

They went down together and she knew she was frail and helpless before his great strength. He grabbed her, his hands, angry hands on her throat—

And lightning struck.

It bounded and bounced off rock a dozen feet from them. It shook the earth and blasted the rock and pieces like shrapnel cluttered all around them and struck them too and Marcia felt hot blood on her arm and it was her own blood.

But Slade had been momentarily stunned and she was running again. Away from him.

But away from the helicopter too. At first she did not realize that but when she did realize it, it was too late. If she doubled back now, she would rush into Slade's arms.

She ran—into the sea.

It was suddenly, unexpectedly calm. It merely eddied around her ankles, as if waiting for something. The storm seemed to be waiting too, lightning holding back, the

thunder stilled, even the rain hanging there in the black heavy sky, waiting . . .

Slade came after her, stalking through the surf.

A single bolt of lightning lanced down at them and a great engulfing roar lifted Marcia, carried her, stunned her, and then the rain pelted down again and the sea was an angry sea and the air was supercharged with ozone and another smell. Like seared flesh.

Like seared flesh.

She saw Adam Slade then. Slade was down in a foot of water, face down. He was not moving and the water lapped around him, over him. She went to him, walking slowly.

The men from the helicopter were there too. They had seen in that final flash of lightning:

"Are you all right, miss?" one of them shouted.

"Yes. Slade?"

They turned him over. They looked at him. "Dead," one of them said.

"Dead," she echoed. She would have collapsed, but they caught her.

**T**HEN THE RAIN really came down, not as it had come before; which was hard enough. It came in huge globes of water and each globe was as big as your head

and if it hit it could stun you.

"Slade?" someone cried as the globes exploded violently in the surf around them.

"He's dead. He'll keep."

And they went back to the helicopter with Marcia, to await the end of the storm there.

When it was over, when the sky was not black but merely the color of lead, they returned down the beach for Slade's body.

But Slade wasn't there.

"But he was dead!" Marcia said incredulously.

One of the men smiled. "He didn't go anyplace under his own power. He was dead, all right. The storm took his body out to sea, is all."

They stood there for a moment, gazing out across the black troubled water of the infant ocean on the infant earth. A billion years ago . . .

Slade was out there. Slade, dead. Out there with the tides and the waters and the frequent electric storms—

"Out there with a million bacteriological parasites on his dead body and in his dead body, which he brought with him," Marcia said dreamily.

"What are you talking about, miss?"

Out there in the electric dawn of earth, with the bacteria which lived in his body as they lived in all other bodies. Out there with

them, dead.

Food for them.

Food and water and air heavy with ozone and the electric storms.

Marcia laughed hysterically. It was a story she wanted to write.

But she wouldn't write it:

Slade was a killer, condemned to die. But Slade, dead out there with his bacteria, Slade evil to man and human society but not necessarily evil in the implacable ways of nature or perhaps grimly, terribly evil—Slade out there, dead on the bosom of the primordial waters, Slade back in time a billion years before life had been born

on Earth . . .

She laughed hysterically as they led her away from the water. They slapped her face, gently at first, then harder. "I'll be all right," she managed to say.

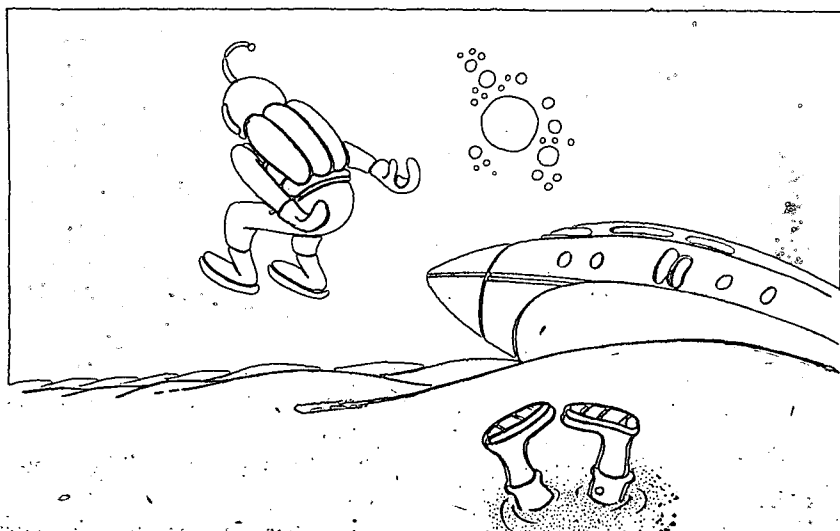
She would be all right. She could live to forget it.

But Slade out there.

Slade.

Slade fathering all life on earth there in the sea with his dead body. Slade who had sinned and was taken back here to die for his sins so that life could be born.

Slade, whose first name was Adam.



*Kohler*

"Getting the hang of it, Pritchard?"

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*Conducted by Mari Wolf*

SCIENCE FICTION conventions, like the science fiction field itself, seem to have passed their peak of quantitativity. I'm not saying that conventions aren't as good as or better than ever, any more than I'm saying that science fiction isn't as good as or better than ever. From all reports I've heard about it, the fans who attended the Cleveland convention consider it one of the best. But the fact remains that not so many people went to Cleveland last year as have gone to conventions in years past - and this despite the fact that the gathering was held in the middle west, accessible to the largest possible number of fans.

The first conventions were very small, with most of the attendees being local fans or fans from nearby cities and only a few coming from distant parts of the country. In these years, science fiction fan-

dom was comparatively small also; the fans of the depression years were close knit, though often quarreling, groups who held themselves almost a breed apart and prided themselves on seeing a future that was comic to most people—a future of space travel, robots, terrible weapons, and new frontiers among the stars.

In the post war years, in the shadow of the A bomb and V-2 rocket, more and more people turned to science fiction. The field grew; more copies of the existing magazines and books sold, new magazines and books started up, and the ranks of fandom swelled. Convention attendance swelled also. A west coast convention, such as the Portland one, might be smaller than the middle western or eastern one preceding it, but each convention in a given area tended to grow larger than any held in that area be-



fore. Now not only active s-f fans came to the conventions; people who perhaps had never read a science fiction magazine showed up. These people had heard science fiction programs on the radio or seen s-f movies or read s-f stories in the big slick magazines; they were interested in the V-2 and its still largely classified successors; some of them were interested primarily in flying saucers.

The Chicago convention had over a thousand members. It apparently reached the numerical peak. Three years later, in 1955, when the convention returned to the midwest at Cleveland, the membership had dropped about fifty per cent.

During these three years, the great boom of science fiction had ended. The number of magazines had dropped, so had the amount of coverage in other mediums. The field as a whole was in a recession. Yet, paradoxically, these same three years had brought more people than ever before to an acceptance of concepts that once were purely science fictional.

People who never read science fiction at all are familiar with the Colliers series on space travel. They're aware of the Mouse project; maybe they don't know what a rocket pushes against in empty space or how you could get something circling around the earth forever and not have it fall down, but they know the US is planning on sending up an artificial satellite. Few laugh any more at the very idea of going to the Moon; they might say, it won't happen in our lifetime, but they're willing to consider the concept.

They don't look forward to the manlike robot; but they'll discuss automation; in fact, it seems to have become a catchword. The factory workers or the office worker might have a sublime disinterest in sociological science fiction, but he's interested in what the new growth of computer theory and the automatic industrial processes will do to *his* job.

Everyone is interested in concepts that were the domain of the science fiction fan just a few years ago. But just because a man is interested in rockets or satellite stations or automation doesn't automatically make him interested in science fiction. He might be working on high temperature alloys to withstand solar radiation outside the atmosphere, but why should he care to read about aliens on Centaurus II? Let's face it, much of what was science fiction yesterday is just today's blueprint and tomorrow's technology.

But whether or not public acceptance of the orbital rocket and nuclear power and the automatic factory has anything whatsoever to do with convention attendance, I certainly can't say. Despite all the polls taken by fans among other fans, does anyone know whether fandom as a whole is growing, standing still, or shrinking? There seem to be as many fanzines as ever. Are there? I don't know. If any fan has conducted a thorough census of past and present zines, I'd like to see it. What about local science fiction clubs? Are there more, about the same number, or fewer of them than there were ten years ago? Again, it would be in-

teresting to see a census.

Perhaps the conventions are growing smaller for reasons totally unrelated to the boom or wane of the general science fiction market. Fans have always been a small percentage of the overall readership of s-f media. Right about the time of the Chicago convention, fans began to say that the cons were getting too big. That you could wander around a hotel lobby for hours and never have a chance to really get acquainted. That the pros kept to themselves too much. That there weren't enough facilities available for fans with common interests to get together and discuss them.

From everything I've heard, there were more facilities available at Cleveland than ever before, even a discussion room open all night to fans. It seemed like a fine get-together, one with almost no complaints.

Is the trend to small conventions and more of them, more regional conferences where smaller numbers of people can meet and discuss their common interests? I've been to both big and small fan gatherings; I'll have to admit that some of the Westercons, with two or three hundred attendees, have been the most fun to me personally. But as to what others think about this, I don't know at all.

Perhaps fandom is splitting into groups that go to conventions, and groups that don't, and the ones that go are the ones that get the most out of them and so think them better and better each year. Perhaps a lot of active fans have stayed away because of the non-active people who just showed up

to see what science fiction was all about. Or perhaps there's no correlation at all, merely chance factors, and next year's get-together, at New York, will be bigger than any previous.

I don't know. It's a question for some present day fan historian - and I'd be interested to see the results of someone's poll or fannish opinion.

\* \* \* \*

Now to the fanzines:

OOPSLA: 15c; Gregg Calkins, 2817 11th St., Santa Monica, Calif.

This issue of OOPS has a very funny reprint from SLANT: the Bob Shaw lectures on Fansmanship. They're not only funny - I've seen them used!

The rest is concerned with zine reviews, a bit by John Berry, another installment of Walt Willis' "Harp Stateside" and some things by Calkins. All in all, OOPS is as good as usual.

Rating: 1.

\* \* \*

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW: 15c; Dick Geis, 1525 N. E., Ainsworth, Portland 11, Oregon. This review should really have a black border around it as a sign of respect to the late PSYCHOTIC. Of course, by the time this is read, its demise will be even older history than it is now. The successor, SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, is mimeoed (this one in green ink!) and has a different format from PSYCHOTIC'S but the same personality. Among others, Harlan Ellison, Damon Knight and Jim Harmon have things in this issue; Ellison with a "Letter from New York" that looks like a permanent

thing.

Funny thing occurred to me concerning Geis the other day. Is he real? Seriously, I don't know anyone who has seen him. He almost came to the Frisco and then didn't because he didn't want to drive down alone or some such. He was all set to go to another con (I've forgotten which) and sprained his wrist or his back or somebody did. I've forgotten the exact details on his lack of appearance but, outside of the Portland group, who has met him? Maybe after this brilliant bit of deduction, I'll find out that everyone in fandom but me knows him personally but, gee what a jolt if R. E. G. turns out to be two eight year old kids!

Oh well, come the next Western I'll find out. But what if he moves before then!

Rating: 1.

\* \* \*

GASP: Gerald Stewart, 166 McRoberts Ave., Toronto 10, Ontario, Canada. There is no set price for GASP; material, comment, trade or even money (any amount) is all that's needed.

Most of this zine is taken up with rambling sorts of things by the editor and some of the others in the group. The existence—nonexistence of Boyd Raeburn still hangs over the picture like smog over Los Angeles. In the letter section, Bob Bloch remarked that he is beginning to distrust anything that comes out of Canada, including Canadian Club! This is serious! If you go for subtle humor, the Toronto bunch is it.

Rating: 2

\* \* \*

CANFAN: William D. Grant, 11 Burton Rd., Toronto 10, Ontario, Canada. No price listed. This issue isn't quite up to the Canadian group's usual standards; of their four articles, two are reprints and not very interesting reprints. The third article is, alas, rather empty too. One interesting thing is the write-up of the '55 Midwesterncon. Judging from this report, things were fine: no drunks, fights or other assorted plagues. The balance of the zine is concerned with a long letter column and a zine review section that lists what they consider the top zine of the quarter and the five next best. In this quarter, top place was split between SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW and SATELLITE.

CANFAN is one zine that consistently has superior reproduction and good, clean layout. And, contrary to some people, I like the mimeod photos - at least when done as well as they do. The most humorous thing was a letter from Ron Ellik, printed in its entirety. Ellik, without realizing it, managed to put both feet in his mouth. Repeatedly! I quote " . . . altho I hope your sentence structure improves. Maybe you don't speak English normally? Lot of French up in that area, aren't there?" I'm sure Ron means well, but I wonder if he's sure just where Toronto is.

Rating: 4

\* \* \*

HYPHEN: 1/-or 15c; Walt Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Rd., Belfast, North Ireland. With this issue HYPHEN's price goes up to 15c American; as the editors say, it's a question of how much money you

can afford to lose. The issues have got bigger and bigger, and so has the cost.

Most of this issue is given over to the Kettering Convention - apparently quite an affair. As Willis says, regarding the universal appearance of beanies atop all fan-nish heads at conventions over there, British fans do what American fans only dream of doing. But somehow British fans seem to be able to act exuberant (childish?) without overdoing it - or so I gather from the reports.

There are also columns by Bob Shaw, John Berry, and HYPHEN's co-editor Chuck Harris. And Willis' account of "Bob Shaw and the Budgerigar" in which is set forth Shaw's contention - that budgies can't talk. But they can. I've heard them. I admit I've never been able to understand a word they say, but this, the owners assert, is because I don't listen carefully. Or, there's the final clincher, "Of course he won't talk for you. He doesn't like you."

Rating: 2

\* \* \*

ALICE: 20c; Kent Corey, Box 64, Enid, Oklahoma. This is a peachy keen put-together thing. Very-well done in some sort of litho, this issue has, according to Corey, 55 illos. His boast is that ALICE is the sexiest zine, if nothing else. I'd be inclined to agree. I counted 12 illos of females: nude, semi-nude, and even a couple with clothes on! All of the art work is excellent, as is the layout. But oh, those typos. Kent pleads that he doesn't have time to correct them but they do more to mess up the mag than any-

thing else.

A rambling, Geis type editorial goes on for five pages, then a seven page zine review column followed by a write up on Don Ford. With some letters from readers, and more editorial, that's it! This issue is blurbed on the cover as the Clevecon issue, but not a mention of the Clevecon did I find. Maybe it's meant as a means of identification. All Alice's readers were to pin them on their coats as they entered the hotel or something. Oh, well, it's one of the best zines from a production standpoint.

Rating: 5

\* \* \*

MAGNITUDE: 10c; Ralph Stapenhorst, 409 W. Lexington Drive, Glendale 3, Calif. This is a good looking, half letter size, photo offset zine. The art done by Ron Cobb, is better than a lot of professional work. Cobb has come a long way with his art in the last few years and, in the next few, should make a good professional artist.

Their regular features include an editorial, a column by Forrest Ackerman, and news of the Chesley Donovan Club, the group that publishes MAGNITUDE. There are two better than average stories, "Mission" by Lewis Kovner and "What You Don't Know" by Paul Arram and an article by Stapenhorst on the filming of "Conquest of Space". The article itself is very interesting but I don't agree with his opinion of the film. Ralph thinks that it may be the science fiction picture of 1955, and warns, "Don't miss it!" I feel that if you were lucky enough to miss it, stay

that way!

MAGNITUDE is a slim sort of thing but the art, reproduction and all around quality make it worth the dime.

Rating: 4

\* \* \*

ALPHA: 60c/year: bi-monthly Jan Jansen, 229 Berchemlei, Borgerhout, Antwerpen, Belgium. U. S. representative: Dick Ellington, 113 W. 84th St., No. 51, N. Y. 24, N. Y.

This, to my knowledge, is the only zine put out regularly in Europe. At least the only one put out for English speaking fans. ALPHA is mimeo, with a lot of attention given to the process so the end result is very legible. The interior art and the cover are well drawn and the format, although slightly cramped, is good.

This issue leads off with an editorial that supposedly continues on page 26; after a confusing search, I found it on 18. Of course, if you continue on to page 26, you end up with an interesting sentence. Following that, Eric Bentcliffe has an interesting article titled "Obscene Writing about SEX", concerned mostly with quotes from some recent s-f stories. It seems that they are trying to stir up discussion on what is fit to print and what isn't. And if it is fit, if they'll let you!

Marie-Louise Share has a short article, the only interesting part being the background of the song, "This Ole House," while Vernon McCain does a very good bit on "Why Review Fanzines?"

Rating: 3

\* \* \*

PEON: 20c; Charles Lee Riddle; PNCA, USN, P. O. Box 511, New

London, Conn. The issue I have here is PEON's 7th anniversary issue—a long time for a fanzine to keep coming out, especially when you consider that editor Riddle is in the Navy and has been transferred quite a few times during these 7 years.

As usual, Peon is good sized, chock full of well known writers and presented in a very readable, neat format. Robert Bloch in his "Credo for Fantasy Writers" lists a few of the things a would be s-f writer should promise not to touch: from a mad scientist with a beautiful daughter to a dinosaur egg that hatches. Then there's Harlan Ellison's story "Night Vigil", which is about a man condemned to a long and solitary life on some galactic outpost so that he can warn Earth and the galaxy when the aliens invade. He has a "scanner" to tell him when the aliens start attacking. When the "scanner" notifies him, he is to push some keys to warn Earth. The story's premise is that a man has to be the lookout instead of a computer since it would take such a huge computing device to respond to all the eventualities. What eventualities? This man has two functions: to watch the scanner and to push the keys. He has no other way, according to the story, to receive or transmit data . . . But it would have taken such a huge device to make the "scanner" trigger the keys when activated?

Dave Mason's "The Death of Conan" is a story of quite a different type. It really has the old Conan flavor, though a few old time Conan fans might not approve of their hero's ending.

Rating: 4

\* \* \*

**INSIDE & SCIENCE FICTION**

**ADVERTISER:** 25c; Ron Smith, 611 West 114th Street, Apartment 3d-310, New York 25, N. Y. Most of this issue is taken up in the discussion "Fire When Ready, Critic!" Sam Moskowitz leads off with "The Strange Business Attitude of the Science Fiction Industry", in which he compares s-f publishing with large business corporations to science fiction's detriment. One of his main assertions is that editors can't take criticism of their product but take all criticism as a personal attack. He definitely prefers some of the science fiction of past eras to the current product, and apparently feels that editor's should also.

Robert Lowndes in "For Robots Only," Larry Shaw in "For People Only," and H. L. Gold in "The Chromium Ring" leap into rebuttal of various points that Sam has made (and Sam's points are always put across forcefully). Lowndes points out how comparison between science fiction publishing and big industry breaks down; Larry Shaw brings up some of the human problems that editors have to face (Larry doesn't get heated, either); and H. L. Gold strikes back at Moskowitz's assertion that editors tend to blacklist their critics.

Very interesting reading, no matter who you're inclined to agree with.

Lin Carter writes a well thought out article on the Bronte family and the fantasy world that they created as children, in "The Angrian

Saga". He gives a very good account of their imaginary land and its inhabitants—and the traces it leaves in their later, adult work.

Rating: 3

\* \* \*

**FEMIZINE:** 4 issues for 2/6 or 35c; American representative, Eva Firestone, Box 515, Upton, Wyoming. In England send your money to Frances Evans, School House, Teignmouth St., Collyhurst, Manchester 9, England.

This issue is loaded with addresses; apparently everyone connected with the zine is a few hundred miles away from all the others. The editor, whose address you use if you're trading zines is Joan Carr, Cyprus Detachment, or Sgt. J. W. Carr, Clearing Wing, R. P. O. Middle East, British Air Forces Post Office 53. There are still a couple of other people (at other places) you write to if you feel like submitting material . . .

This zine is by and for the femme fan. Frances Evans reports on the Minicon, which was sort of a private convention Madeline Willis styles herself "The Hostess With the Mostest (To Put Up With)" in her account of meeting Walt and Irish fandom and life as part of a Ghoddminton crew. There are also extensive fanzine reviews and letters to the editors.

Plus Francezca's Column - very well written and concerning man's (or woman's) duty to participate in society and not just read about, talk about, or feel superior to it. A bit intense, but well done. Francezca has been paid what I guess is the supreme compliment - one of her readers for some time was con-

vinced she must be a man.

Rating: 6

\* \* \*

EISFA: 5c; Juanita Coulson, 407½ East 6th St., North Manchester, Indiana. The only thing of much interest in this issue is "Medic and Manure," written by Bob Briney. This is mostly concerned with the gag pulled on Evelyn Gold by Doc Barrett and other assorted con

men. Evelyn had bumped her ankle so the group proceeded to administer first aid. With full camera coverage. The rest of the zine is rather skimpy, a couple of very short bits of humor, a poem, and a short fiction piece. The zine is well produced, thought, and only 5c.

Rating: 6

That's all the fanzines for this time.

*Mari Wolf*

## INTRODUCING the AUTHOR

★ *Edmond Hamilton* ★

(Concluded From Page 2)

raccoon who like our sweet-corn, and deer who also like sweet-corn.

I think that covers the vital statistics. And by the way, the accompanying likeness of myself is the work of that mightiest of all Lensmen, Dr. E. E. "Skylark" Smith. He vowed he could make me look good where others had failed — the credit or blame is all his.

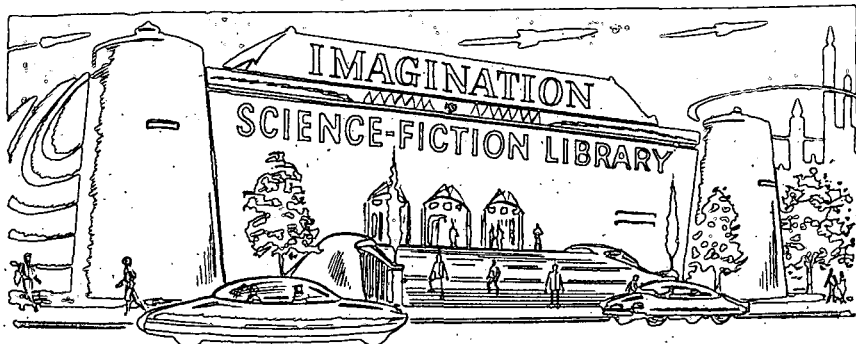
My interest in s-f dates back to a time when I was so young I could barely read, but was fascinated by the illustrations of an H. G. Wells article, "The Things that Live on Mars," in the old *Metropolitan Magazine*. I soon graduated to the *Argosy* and *Allstory* magazines, with the mighty Martian stories of Burroughs and all the other great fantastic stories they

published for so many years.

Recently, Dr. C. L. Barrett of Bellefontaine, Ohio, was kind enough to let me dig through his magnificent collection of the old magazines — and it was like vividly re-living years of my younger days, to look over those well-remembered stories again — Burroughs, and Merritt, and the "Polaris" stories of Stillson, the cosmic adventure stories of Homer Eon Flint, to my mind still under-rated as a pioneer; the eery yarns of Tod Robbins; the Giesy novels of the Dog-Star Pack; the "Flying Legion" of George Allan England, and a host of others. I loved them all, and in time wanted to write such stories myself. So I tried, and I've been trying ever since.

—Edmond Hamilton





## — REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

*Conducted by Henry Bott*

**Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review one or more — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.**

### ARK OF VENUS

*by Clyde B. Clason, \$2.00, 181 pages, Alfred A. Knopf, publishers, New York, New York.*

The problems of building a "thrust-ship" to colonize Venus in the post-Atomic war years, and the problems of settling the planet itself, are the subjects of this juvenile. The characterizations are good, much of the technological description fascinating, and the suggested political milieu most interesting. I would say that you might enjoy this book as well or better than much of the material that masquerades under the guise of science-fiction in the new books.

It is difficult for me to assess juveniles in science-fiction in some respects. A touchstone of the highest excellence already exists in this field. You ask, how does the book

compare with what Heinlein has done? The series of juveniles he's done and which have had such wide popularity, are so good, so durable, that comparison with them is inevitable for any similar book.

"Ark of Venus" is not as good as one of these, but it is a number of cuts above the numerous juveniles which have appeared in the last few years. In no sense for example does it condescend to the reader, a fault not uncommon among this type.

Were I to introduce a young reader to science-fiction, assuming the comic books hadn't ruined his appetite, I'd insist on everything that Heinlein wrote. With that background, he'd quickly form his own tastes and judgments, I'm sure.



## THE END OF ETERNITY

by Isaac Asimov, \$2.95, 192 pages, Doubleday & Company, Garden City, New York.

Prolific Asimov has churned out another novel, and in this case I find it rather entertaining. Andrew Harlan, (a very staid name for the time) an Eternal Technician, has the job of traversing time, easing and smoothing the rough spots in temporal history—a temporal watchman, so to speak. Tensed by a love story in which the lovers raise hob with Time, this unusual conceit really is interesting. The book is burdened with technical nonsense, but all in all it is worth

reading. I find myself smiling as I write this because certainly I could not say the same about the "Robot" or the "Foundation" stories. Asimov is a literate, intelligent man; when he sets his mind to it, as he has here, he turns out an excellent piece of work.

But to return to the book; I cannot in conscience say that this story is great, but it is entertaining. If you're a fan, you'll need no encouragement to get this; if you are not and would like to know Asimov's work, I suggest this as an introduction. I hope this is a harbinger of his inevitable forthcoming novels.

## TIME BOMB

by Wilson Tucker, \$2.75, 246 pages, Rinehart & Company, Inc., New York 16, N. Y.

This is a detective story, a captivating detective story in many ways with a leaven of science-fiction—but still a detective story. If that sounds derogatory, it is not intended to be, for Wilson Tucker has written an entertaining thriller.

Mysterious bombs exploded in rainy weather, always destroying the fanatic "Sons of America" in the process. With this thread to link the explosions, Danforth of the Illinois Secret Police sets out to determine the cause. And for once, time-travel is interesting!

Because it is a mystery story—not in the hard-boiled style—it is impossible to say much about the plot without revealing too much. Suffice it to say that the characterization is excellent, there is

enough action to satisfy a Davy Crockett aficionado, and in general it's worth a reading.

In fact it is a welcome change from the fiercely futuristic brand of science fiction. Because it is a detective story the method is familiar and we're treated to the sight of a gifted detective exercising the deductive faculty with skill and insight.

A sense of humor which Wilson has, makes itself felt in the story and in spite of a certain grimness in the detective's relentlessness, here are quite a few laughs.

Television comes in for a merciless satiric roasting, one of the best things in the book.

After reading TIME BOMB I'm convinced that science-fiction needs more of the writing devoted to present times with just the "teeniest extrapolation" . . .

# Letters

## from the Readers

### ORCHIDS TO DANNY

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Question. Which science fiction magazine is the best on the market—tops in stories, quality, and articles?

Answer: IMAGINATION, of course!

May I send my thanks and congratulations to Daniel F. Galouye for another terrific story? I'm talking about "The Day The Sun Died" in the December issue. I couldn't lay the issue down once until I finished the story. This was truly a great sequel to Dan's "Tonight The Sky Will Fall" which appeared in the May 1952 issue. Orchids to Danny for a wonderful job. And Orchids to *Madge* for being a wonderful magazine!

I must admit I haven't been keeping up to date with *Madge*—or stf—but I intend to from now on. The first science fiction book I picked up was *Madge*—the January 1952 number. While I've got a two year collection I intend to fill in

all the back issues I missed.

Back to the December issue: "Not In The Script" merits an A-rating, very good; "Selling Point" a B-rating. Haven't quite had time to complete the rest of the issue but it looks like it's a top number.

Keep the cartoons coming—and all present departments.

Barbara Joseph  
547 E. 12th St.  
Oakland, Cal.

*We're pleased you like Dan Galouye's novel. We agree with you that it was a fine sequel to his earlier novel. To complete your MADGE collection turn to page 129 and look over the back issue order blank. . . . . with*

NO MORE LOAFING . . .

Dear Bill:

Congratulations! After almost two years of loafing you're getting *Madge* back on its editorial feet.

The Rognan cover on the December issue was the best you've

had in a long time. — Too long! The two-color interiors, while nice, tend to take the detail out of the illustrations.

The stories in the December issue were quite good. **THE DAY THE SUN DIED** was an excellent sequel, though I wouldn't say it was better than **TONIGHT, THE SKY WILL FALL**.

I've noticed in recent issues you've been trending toward the better class of stories that were so evident in *Madge's* earlier issues. Well-thoughtout and suspenseful stories. This is all to the good. Keep it up.

James Burroughs  
1075 Calder Ave.  
Beaumont, Texas

*More Rognan covers coming up, Jim. The boy's really making his mark in the field! As to the stories—they'll be tops too! . . . wlh*

**ROGNAN PARADOX . . .**

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I must be losing my touch. Either that or else your new stf artist, Lloyd Rognan, is one of the most erratic artists I've ever come across. Let me clarify this. I saw Rognan's work for the first time illustrating **THE METAL EMPEROR** on the cover of the November '55 issue of your companion magazine, **IMAGINATIVE TALES**. I thought it was positively the worst piece of work imaginable. But lo and behold I pick up the December issue of *Madge* and find a veritable masterpiece by the self-same Rognan. How can an artist be so bad and so good in successive months?

Yes, the December *Madge* cover

is the best in many issues. It even surpasses the McCauley and Terry covers. Please, have this lad do more work!

The December *Madge* makes an overpowering statement when you try to evaluate the stories—and that is that both *Madge* and *Tales* are featuring better and better novelettes while showing up with just the opposite in the shorter length stories. **THE DAY THE SUN DIED** and **UNDERGROUND** are both tops in December, but the other yarns miss the boat completely. I'd like to see you come up with better shorts in the future.

As always, your departments are great, but what happened to Forry Ackerman? There's nobody like him when it comes to writing a good meaty film news column—and I certainly enjoy his department **SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE**. Bring back Ackerman!

**FANDORA'S BOX** is always good, but let Hank Bott review more titles in the **SCIENCE FICTION LIBRARY**. A measly "single" book reviewed is not enough!

Kenn Curtis  
4722 Peabody Ave.  
Cincinnati 27, Ohio

*Lloyd Rognan's cover on the November issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES was the first stf cover he painted; we don't mean that we think it was bad—to the contrary we liked it! But since that time Lloyd has been getting the "feel" of science fiction and naturally his future covers will have more sparkle and zing. What's happened to Forry? He's around, Kenn! His SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE column*

is now a regular department in our companion magazine, *IMAGINATIVE TALES*. You mean to say you haven't noticed? Bott will be reviewing more books. It isn't that we held him down—we review every book in the field that crosses our desk. So book publishers please take note . . . . . wkh

### THE FIRST—BUT NOT LAST!

Dear 'Mr. Hamling:

I just finished reading the December issue of *IMAGINATION*—the first copy of your magazine I've ever read. It certainly won't be the last! With so many stiff magazines deservedly falling by the wayside it's good to see one at long last that is worthwhile reading.

I can find fault only with the short, *NOT IN THE SCRIPT*, which seemed a bit ridiculous and pointless. Also, the ending of *SELLING POINT* was, I thought, stiff—almost sermonish. Otherwise it was a fine story. — In a fine magazine.

Sol Klein  
1631 Amsterdam Ave.  
New York, N. Y.

*Welcome into the fold, Sol. The only question we'd like to ask is—what took you so long! . . . wkh*

### HAMILTON NOW ABOARD!

Dear Bill:

Just got the December issue of *Madge*. I'm happy to see you're heading back to readable science fiction! *THE UNDERGROUND*, by Gordon Dickson is, I think, the best he's ever written. Keep pub-

lishing yarns like that and nothing can dislodge *Madge* from the top!

*THE DAY THE SUN DIED* was well written and probably well-received, especially by those who didn't read *TONIGHT THE SKY WILL FALL* in the May '52 issue. The other stories in the issue were somewhat ancient as far as ideas go.

Incidentally, how about running another Woo-Woo story by Sherwood Springer?

And also, when is Geoff St. Reynard coming back?

Even further—would it be possible to get a story by Edmond Hamilton? It might cost more—but it would be worth it!

Jeremy Millett  
1446 Garden St.  
Park Ridge, Ill.

*Don't know what's happened to Springer . . . Geoff St. Reynard is working hard on a new novel which we're sure is good news. Ed Hamilton? Hah! Read the cover story this issue? How's that for fast service! — Ed will be back frequently! . . . . . wkh*

### SENSE OF LOSS AND SORROW

Dear Bill:

I read the letter of Rory Faulkner and your agreement with him, in the December letter column—with a sense of loss and sorrow.

Granted that for some folks a story meant to provoke thought is too deep for reading pleasure. It is also good, that for these people, *Madge* should print stories more acceptable to them. But it makes a person feel lonely when he knows

that people who should agree with, and understand him, do not do so.

I was under the impression that the very idea and soul of science fiction is to open our eyes to the worlds of tomorrow—in our time. It hardly seems possible that because a story may have “sociological” significance it may be obnoxious to an sf fan! I thought that being an sf fan was the reason these stories were interesting to me!

But even if sociology bores most readers, let me point out a fact. Mr. Faulkner prays for a return to the “space opera” type of story —“that used to be so utterly fascinating.”

A few space operas were beautifully done. But the majority were rehashes of the same old theme, ignoring characterization, and even scientific accuracy; they created unreal, and very unlikely situations which were in turn overcome by some conveniently invented unscientific idea. The fact is—and Faulkner said it—they “used” to be fascinating!

I believe people nowadays are educated beyond the scope of the mere space opera. They want more in a story. The “starry-eyed wonder” of the newer reader has surely worn off—and the old magic of the earlier stories read by us old-timers has long gone.

As I recall, the “Tarzan” stories used to be fascinating to me. But re-reading them today is a big disappointment . . . The old thrill has passed.

So don't go backward with Madge. Space stories are better for-

gotten, unless one comes along that is truly different. Leave the old blood-and-thunder back where it belongs, in the past.

Gwen Cunningham  
13801 E. 14th St.  
San Leandro, Cal.

*The very argument you use against the so-called space opera can be brought to bear against the sociological type of story; they USED to be fascinating! They certainly are no longer. Main distinction—is that a space opera uses adventure as its motivation, whereas the “adult” story tries to educate first, and entertain as a by-product; if indeed it has any entertainment value at all!*

*Let's face it, most of us read—and enjoy—science fiction because it entertains us. And this does not mean we are closing our eyes to the worlds of tomorrow—to the contrary, by taking off on an adventure to other planets or the stars we are living tomorrow—today!*

*That “old magic” you mentioned included, among other things, atomic power, radar, television, rockets, etc. Yet you contend that space opera incorporated ideas lacking scientific accuracy!*

*The “old magic” is still there to enjoy—with such “unlikely” ideas being expounded as telepathy, teleportation, telekinesis, time travel, inter-galactic space drives, etc. Sure, the basis of space opera is adventure—but afterall, adventure is what makes a story! Coupling adventure with “unscientific” ideas such as above is what gives us the “starry-eyed wonder” science fiction is meant to impart.*

*MADGE isn't going backward—we're going forward to breath-taking thrills throughout the universe. Thrills which will become a reality someday. To our way of thinking that's enjoying science fiction to the fullest. . . . . wh*

### THAT "WHAT IF—" FEELING

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I am an stf fan—or at least *was* one; seems to me something is wrong with current science fiction!

Stories that I've read in the past year seem something akin to science fiction, but lack the oomph that put the reader into a daze for an hour—made him think, "What if—"

It isn't me. I haven't changed. I believe the authors ought to look around and realize they've been slipping up! They're not entertaining us as they used to!

Jim Mays  
607 Lambert St.  
Belpre, Ohio

*Your letter carries out the discussion in the previous letter, Jim. You're right—science fiction did change. But as far as Madge and Imaginative Tales are concerned, we'll be giving you the type of stf you want. We've got some top-notch writers and the boys know how to get that "What If—" feeling into their yarns. . . . . wh*

### STF CONFERENCE

Dear Bill:

If there is still time to have material included in your issue on sale around March 1st, we would

greatly appreciate your mentioning the following:

The 2nd Annual Southeastern Science Fiction Conference will be held at the Hotel Charlotte, Charlotte, N. C., March 3rd and 4th.

Attending will be fans and professionals from all sections of the nation.

One dollar registration fee should be mailed to Robert A. Madle, 1620 Anderson St., Charlotte, N. C.

We hope that many *Madge* readers will be able to attend the conference. We guarantee everyone will have a good time!

Ian T. McCauley  
Publicity Chairman  
57 East Park Lane  
Atlanta 5, Ga.

*We're glad to make mention of the conference. And if at all possible we'll try and make it ourselves! Hope everybody will! . . . wh*

### HAUNT THE STANDS!

Dear Bill:

Thought I'd drop you a line while in the letter writing mood! Just finished going over the December issue of *Madge*—including cartoons and letter section. I must say that Rory Faulkner's letter was one of the best I ever read. Although I am not going to dig back in my collection to read some really good stories.

Instead, I'll haunt the newsstands for new issues of IMAGINATION and IMAGINATIVE TALES. Both these magazines are showing great improvement. For example, I recently got hold of the first issue of *Madge*, the October 1950 number.

Taking the cover, for instance, and comparing it with what you're using today— well, there's no comparison.

A question: why did you change the subtitle on the cover from "Stories of Science and Fantasy" to "Science Fiction"?

John Elledge  
3007 West Ave.  
Austin, Texas

We changed the subtitle because IMAGINATION is, afterall, a science fiction magazine. We run a fantasy story only occasionally. Reason for this is quite simple: fantasy has no great popular appeal. Or, to put it another way, perhaps more accurately, science fiction has much greater appeal than fantasy. . . . . wh

## CONCLUSION ERRONEOUS

Dear Bill:

I rest my case as follows:

SUBJECT: December 1955 issue of *Madge*.

COMPLAINT: The revision and reprint of a story by Dan Galouye, TONIGHT THE SKY WILL FALL under a new title, THE DAY THE SUN DIED.

EVIDENCE. Copy of May '52 issue.

CONCLUSION: IMAGINATION should not feature reprints.

Don Berhent  
1246 Lander Rd.  
Cleveland 24, Ohio

The novel in the December issue was a sequel, Don. We never have used a reprint—and never will. wh

## Back Issues of Imagination Available

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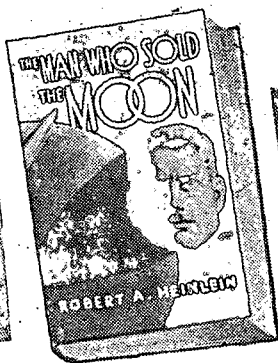
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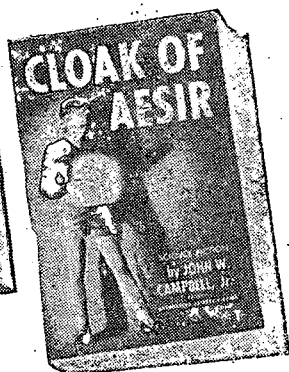
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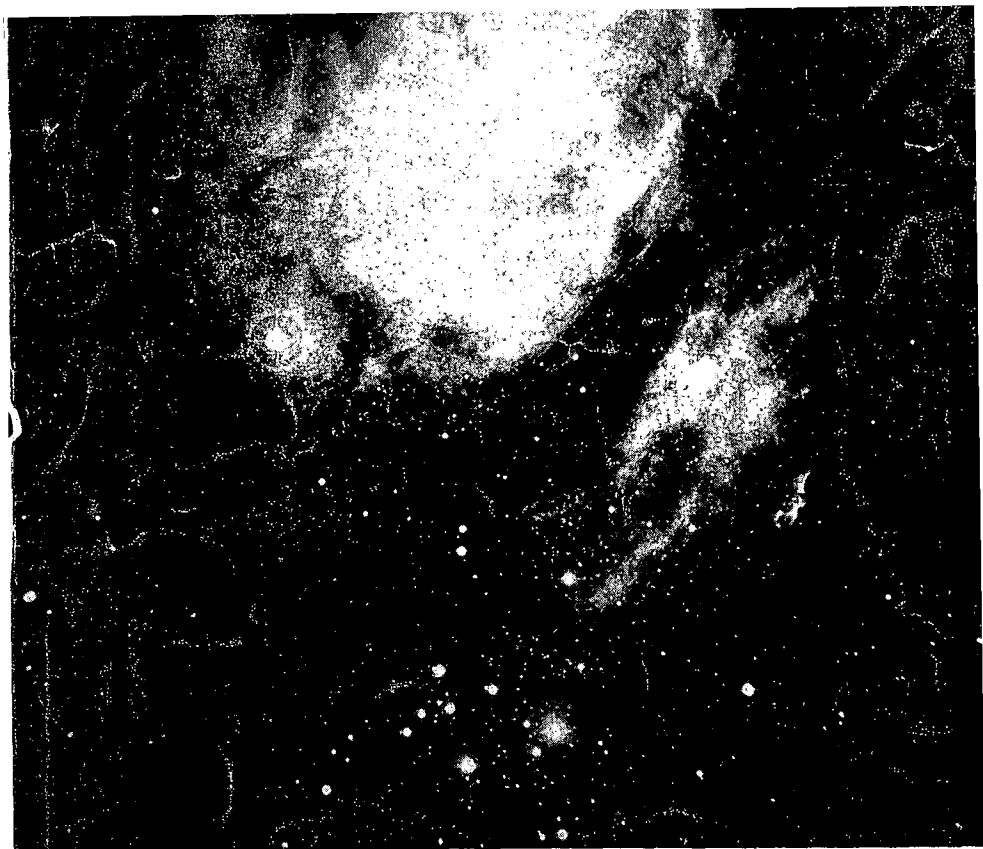
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## **TOMORROW'S SCIENCE**

**NEBULA IN SAGITTARIUS:** Known as the "Lagoon" Nebula, photo was shot in red light with 200 inch telescope. Many light years distant, note the resemblance to two islands in sea of space with cove or "lagoon" between.

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